Chrome Shelled Regios Volume9

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These are novel illustrations that were included in volume 9

鋼殻のレギオス IX
ブルー・マズルカ

「わたしたちのことを、忘れないで」

再会したリーリンが、レイフォンに渡そうとしているもの。それは、レイフォンの育ての親であり武芸の師でもある、デルクが託した錬金鋼（ダイト）だった。

しかし、デルクの「許し」の証（あかし）ともいえるそれを、レイフォンは拒絶する。思い悩むリーリンだが、レイフォンもまた、行き場のない思いを抱えていた。

その頃、ツェルニにはまたもや非常事態宣言が発令されようとしていた。都市戦が行われる中、ひそかにツェルニに潜伏中のサヴァリスは、うろんな男と接触する。そして、さまざまな思惑がツェルニに集い、動き出す——。

恋も物語も、かつてない劇的展開へ!!

鋼殻のレギオス IX

ブルー・マズルカ

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真っ青な空、輝く太陽、熱い砂浜！

そこにこそ、おれたちの青春がある！

鋼殻のレギオス IX

ブルー・マズルカ

あなたは、なに？

「レイフォン……」

「うん……」

名前を呼んでから、
リーリンはしばらくレイフォンの顔をじっと見つめていた。
それはまるで、今のレイフォンを確かめているかのようだ。

Prologue

So hot.

Such a foul smell.

"So annoying," Barmelin complained. Her voice echoed and gradually faded. The thick pipe next to her was happily operating. Barmelin's height wasn't something she was proud to show in front of others. The pipe was much bigger than her body and its inside continued to exude heat. Thanks to that, it was still extremely hot to walk on the cleaner path next to it. Even the water was hot. Water for the living passed through this pipe before being purified. Because of the heat, the bacteria was having a blast multiplying in the pipe, and as such, the smell was much sharper than usual.

"I'm so unlucky..." she said. The smell entering through her mouth made her frown. Even so, she brushed away the tree roots blocking her and continued her walk.

Why was she even doing this?

That question had already been kicked flying away.

This was the Queen's order, and that meant everything. The Queen's command was beyond all unreasonable things in this city. Before her words, all of Grendan's citizens had to obey. There was no other way. That was what it meant to be a Queen.

So Barmelin had to obey the Queen. Even though she thought other people were more suited to this job than her, she could only obey the Queen's order. Besides, she thought it was wonderful to play rock, paper, scissors. No matter how powerful one was, there was a chance of losing in this game.

(Why did I have to change from paper at that time...)

Barmelin hated herself. She knew from that fight with Cauntia, the idiot who ambushed her, the idiot who had part of her chest cut away from the wind pressure would decide on scissors...

She had already played scissors so many times.....

"Rock, paper, scissors." In the end, Barmelin chose paper. She knew Cauntia had a sly smile on her face at that moment. Her smile had put doubt in her heart, and so she changed her decision to scissors.

So she became the loser dog.

"Go die, you ambushing idiot."

And everyone else should just go die as well.

Barmelin kept moving forward as she cursed and swore. The weapon harness hanging from her waist made a "saasaa" noise. In it were a number of Dites, and chains served to decorate her clothes. Her face was very pale. No one knew whether it was because of makeup or if her health was bad. Her short hair was naturally black. Her lips were painted blue, and black color circled

her eyes. No one was probably more suitable than her to the phrase of "having the aura of the underworld".

Barmelin? Reverse? Delbone?

She was also one of the great Heaven's Blade Successors. There was a reason behind it.

The sun was close. Sunlight heated her head. In the middle of the courtyard, Alsheyra supported her big hat with a hand as she lifted her head to look at the sun.

"So hot."

The city had entered the tropics. Though the air shield had reduced some of the sun's heat, it was difficult to dispel the heat that had entered the city. The heat was gaseous and this situation couldn't be helped. The air shield was created to maintain a sealed space.

"How long has it been since we last had summer?"

Alsheyra complained on the hammock. This was the most ventilated place. The wind blowing past here blew away the sweat on her feet.

"It's been five years," Kanaris said beside her.

"This is the war period. There might be other cities around."

Usually, Grendan moved in spring and winter areas. A large part of the year was in spring, and the rest was spent in winter. It wouldn't enter a summer area. When summer arrived, it meant Grendan was moving in an area it didn't usually enter.

"So troublesome...I'm sure there's nothing to be benefited from by coming here."

Filth monsters were unusually numerous in Grendan's path. Hence, normal Regios wouldn't go near Grendan. This meant Grendan had sole possession of the selenium mine in its vicinity. It had no need to fight to gain another city's selenium mine. In exchange, it fought filth monsters.

"But it's so hot," Alsheyra said in irritation. Evaporated water touched the glass of fruit juice.

"Right, let's make a swimming pool?"

"We don't have any spare money in the budget," Kanaris immediately gave a cold refusal.

Alsheyra looked unhappy.

"Well then, is it all right to swim in the breeding lake?"

"If Your Majesty has finished all the work, then it's up to you."

"Sometimes, it's all right to put the problems of reality to the back of the mind."

"Hasn't Your Majesty been doing that all the time?"

"Aaa, what a purposeless life," Alsheyra sighed and curled up on the hammock. Kanaris was stubborn. She would wait till Alsheyra changed her way of thinking.

"Speaking of which....."

Losing to the heat, she gave up curling into a ball and reached for the glass of juice.

"Why did we come to the tropics five years ago?"

"I can only think of the fight with Behemoth? Nothing else special happened."

"Ah, Behemoth, how nostalgic...You still remember."

"Not many filth monsters we fought were given names."

"Really? Wu..... I suppose."

Even though the filth monster was so powerful it was given a name, it only meant so little to Alsheyra, and that was shocking for Kanaris, Lintence, Savaris, and Layfon. It took the strongest Heaven's Blade Successor, Lintence, and two other Heaven's Blades to defeat the filth monster. Kanaris had witnessed Alsheyra's strength through her eyes and body. Even so, she still didn't know the Queen's true strength. Did her strength really come from the Haikizoku?

Haikizoku. The Electronic Fairy that had gone insane from having lost its city. Because of its hatred against filth monsters, the Electronic Fairy changed its energy and came to possess Military Artists to act as an avenger. However, no shadow of madness was found in Alsheyra. Lazy and arrogant, this was Alsheyra Almonise , but Kanaris knew this was only the superficial side of her. Though she was lazy, it wasn't like she never tried. Though she was arrogant, she knew what gentleness was like.

"Speaking of which, it was just a filth monster with a name. Why did the city change its path for it?"

"It's impossible to predict the city's destination."

"Well, still."

"Is it all right if I intrude?" A leisurely voice of an old woman suddenly descended.

"Delbone? What is it?"

The voice was Delbone's, the only Psychokinesist among the Heaven's Blades.

"It seems someone has invaded the inner court of that place."

Kanaris' expression turned horrible after listening to Delbone's report, but Alsheyra's expression remained unchanged.

"Heh," she replied. "Well, I don't think anyone can just enter that place, but we can't just let this slide."

"Yes, but that area isn't in operation. It's been sealed. Even if that person can reach that place, he certainly can't enter it."

"But just in case," Kanaris said.

Alsheyra nodded. "Yes, but we can't send too many people."

"Then how about sending a Heaven's Blade?"

"That's the best way."

After this simple decision, all the Heaven's Blades were summoned and a great rock, paper, scissors match took place. In the end Barmelin was the one to take up this mission.

"Go die, you foul smelling Majesty."

Barmelin moved in the foul smell as she cursed the tree roots. If she had taken the clear path in the Mechanical Department, she wouldn't be in this tragic situation. No, there might be other trouble. But to Barmelin, taking the other route was better than this one.

However, the Queen's reason had prevented her from doing so.

"If a fight occurs there, it'd damage the Mechanical Department. Take the alley and fight at the entrance of the inner court."

This kind of tree was important to the water purification system of the city, so the tree roots weren't something Barmelin could just destroy. But in order to release her stress, she was taking it out on

the roots. Because of the roots, it took longer to get to her destination. She had thought for a number of times that it was better to take the normal route.

The normal route ran from the Mechanical Department to the depth of the court. As it took advantage of the Department where the city's legs moved, the route was like a maze. One might get lost in the maze or even be squashed to death by the walls. As such, it'd take a considerable amount of time to take that route, so instead, Barmelin had to go through the alley.

After a hard time, Barmelin finally managed to separate the roots. The foul smell now clung to her clothes. She decided to throw away the clothes she wore after everything had finished. Then she would need to melt herself in the bathtub. As she silently made her vow, she suddenly halted her steps.

A wall had appeared before her. She knocked on the wall with a rhythm and a crack split to run from the bottom of the wall to the top. Compressed air leaked out of the crack as the wall separated into two to reveal a straight path behind it. Barmelin moved past the walls.

The two halves of the wall returned to form one wall.

The light had disappeared. Barmelin strode forward in the dark.

After passing through the hell like maze, he finally arrived.

"Geez, is this a joke," the man said. Anytime he recalled the event in the maze, trembling would seize him. A complicated path was all right, but the walls kept moving and the exit kept changing as a result. Also, the design that made him cry was made on top of a permanent exit. In addition, the walls really did want to kill him and make him into mincemeat. Even a Military Artist would find it very difficult to fight metal plates.

The man's body shook once more. He had to quickly forget that feeling.

"It's busy on that side. This thing doesn't match at all, really," he complained, his voice echoing in the huge space.

Everything else was dim, but lamps hung on the walls, shining with blue light. The air wasn't too bad. It didn't feel suffocating. He got the impression of a spacious area.

Still, it felt different from the feeling he got standing on a grassy plain. This was a feeling of being defeated by an artificial space. The feeling coming through the soles of his feet was different from before. This floor was made of polished stones. It reflected the blue light, making the place like the world of night. In the depths of the space was a huge door, and a circle of blue light surrounded it, as if to stress the existence of the door.

This was the man's destination, but his feet wouldn't move.

"..... As I said, can't you try to understand my troubles?" he said, rooted on the spot, his red hair swaying as if resisting the darkness.

"Are you shitting?"

The obvious disapproval came from a female.

"Hey, hey, isn't that too dirty," the man said with a helpless expression, but he felt cold sweat on his entire body.

(Damn, I can't fight her like how I played with those guys before.)

He knew he had been noticed. Even for him who could move between cities at will, he could not move as he wished in this place . For the Wolf Faces and he himself, this was the biggest door of the ghost. This was a city dominated by unusual Miltiary Artists who obeyed a super-unusual person. And the person in the depths of this city was also..... He knew it wasn't easy to invade this city. But how did she get here earlier than him?

Though he could feel her presence, he had yet to see her. She wasn't using Sakkei. Taking advantage of the good echoing properties of this room, she was hiding in his blind spot.

"So terrible, as expected of Grendan."

"You're so noisy, you idiot, go die."

The light of a Dite being restored flashed behind the man. The female's feet appeared above his own back. The man also restored his Dite, an elongated metal rod. His weapon was the metal whip. The light of restoration shone around his body.

The man readied himself to receive the presence pressing close to his back..... but, the attack wasn't here!?

"Damn!"

Sensing danger in a split second, he jumped. The Kei covering his body shook because of external Kei, but it had yet to attack him .

Her voice sounded from somewhere in the room.

"You were just shitting too."

The consecutive attacks came from outside his sight. He swung the metal whip and blocked the small and sharp rain of external Kei.

"A gun!"

He understood what type of weapon she held.

"Troublesome!"

He thought the rain had stopped, but it then assaulted him from an impossible direction. He blocked it with his weapon again and jumped to change his position.

The advantage of a gun was that it automatically turned the Kei into external Kei. This way, the user didn't have to spend time to make external Kei, so her attacking speed was much higher. The user needed to continuously pour Kei into the weapon and pull the trigger. The shortcoming was that the Kei poured into the weapon was basically turned into external Kei and nothing else, so it couldn't be used any other ways. Because of its other shortcoming of being unable to adjust its power, it was useless against Military Artists with strong defense and filth monsters with strong scales. But the advantage that one couldn't ignore was the weapon's long range and consecutive attacks. The user could concentrate on using Kei to strengthen her body. In this regard, even Savaris who was good at close combat was lacking.

Heaven's Blade Successor Barmelin Swattis Nolne, the slaughterer without a pose.

"Die, idiot. Die, idiot. Die, idiot."

Her voice was not muffled. She continued to shoot the Kei bullets, just wanting to kill the man.

"Your words are too awful."

The man gave up moving and blocked her attacks on the spot. The light of Kei covering his body shone more intensely as it received all the Kei bullets.

(Strange.)

Suspicion surfaced in his mind as he defended himself. His opponent must be a Heaven's Blade Successor. He could tell as he had to use everything he had to take the speed of her bullets, but on this point alone, his opponent's assault power was too weak. Though the power was weakened as she was using a gun, wasn't this weapon too weak for a Heaven's Blade Successor?

Was she not using a Heaven's Blade?

This was his conclusion by speculating on the quality of the gun . A bad premonition flashed past him.

He jumped.

A flash of light instantly conquered the surrounding blue light.

"Tsk."

Barmelin responded again at that result.

"You shitting lucky idiot, go die."

She swung the Dite to dispel the remnants of heat from it. The gun she was holding had now turned into a chain, clinging on her body.

Right now, she was holding a big long cannon. A target sat on the shining silvery white body of the cannon. Barmelin could shoot while holding the weapon.

This was her Heaven's Blade. She used a Dite that changed its form according to the situation. This was her fighting style.

The man was gone.

She stood at the entrance, looking around. Even his presence was gone.

"Did you finish him?" Delbone's voice came from the flake that had floated down from the ceiling.

"I don't feel that I've totally finished him."

"Ala Ala. How rare."

"Which side are you on?"

"Uh, his presence is gone."

"Looks like he isn't here anymore."

The two of them had the same opinion. The man had suddenly vanished. He had avoided Barmelin's attack and had vanished from Delbone's net of Psychokinesis.

"What is he?"

"Who knows? I remember a red haired Military Artist who wields a metal whip, but this man's age doesn't match that in my memory. He's got a ten year gap."

"Is he masking his age with Kei like Her Majesty?"

"Perhaps."

"You too!"

An angry howl from Barmelin as her expression turned terrible.

The depth of the court. This area sunk in darkness and blue light once more returned to peace. Steady stirring that rocked one to sleep dispelled the remnants of war. Sleepiness called forth dreams. Dreams shook the darkness. The shaking darkness reflected reality, but reality was not here.

It was in a place far far away, but in fact, it wasn't all that far.....

"Ah," the man moaned.

He had taken the external Kei with his back. Small tree branches hammered his entire body. In the end, the huge tree trunk had stopped his momentum.

"Wu....."

Through the gap of the tree, he saw the clock tower that he had once seen. He put a hand to his temple.

"Is it here again? Why? Why do I always return here?" the red haired man, Dixerio..... Dixerio Maskane said. He moaned because of the pain.

The breeding lake reflected the sunlight beside him. It was too bright.

And the huge noise that was like the sun echoed in his ears.

"..... It's summer."

He said without much thinking, and then his consciousness faded.

Chapter 1 - Summer

"Summer~~"

"I like swimsuits~~ the best~~"

Nina frowned at the shouts coming from the lake. "Who's saying those shameful things?"

People crowded the swimming area of the lake. It was hard to find the person who shouted out those words, even for a Military Artist.

"No no, I understand his feelings." Sharnid nodded. "The passion sealed within uniforms can now be released. That's the song of a man's soul. It's a joyful song."

"Shut up, you lowlife," Dalshena tossed her bag to him. "Can't you live seriously?"

"Of course, I'm always serious."

"Sorry, it's my fault. It's useless talking to you."

"So mean," he smiled.

Dalshena sighed.

Nina gradually lost interest in their interaction.

Felli was looking around, holding an umbrella with a "nothing to do with me" attitude. And Layfon was watching them with a funny smile.

"Ah, unexpected, but there're so many people here," Mifi said, shielding her eyes with her hand as she watched the crowd. " Wonder whether the changing room has any space?"

"It should be full," Meishen said uneasily.

And.....

"All lockers are full. We can still use the changing room, but we have to watch our luggage," Leerin said, reading from the notice.

"Ah, I'll look after the luggage," Harley raised his hand. Beside him, Kirik was glaring at the sun with an unhappy expression.

"Is that ok?"

"Of course. We aren't gonna swim."

"Then what did you come here for?"

"To sunbathe," he gave a quick reply to Nina and Leerin, who were still hesitating. Kirik seemed to be saying something, but it must be something unpleasant.

Layfon deeply felt that they were used to her. Leerin. She had been here for three months now. Many things happened during that time. The number of roaming buses had decreased because it

was still wartime, so she had decided to temporarily stay here and study. As a third year student, she lived with Nina because she heard the rent was cheap. That really was like her. And she had also found a part time job at the fast food place near the dormitory of the first year.

Three months had passed by in the blink of an eye. Leerin had completely merged into Zuellni's atmosphere.

(Is this good?)

It wasn't that he had to think like this. Grendan was there. But Leerin really couldn't return in this situation, and she didn't want to drag down her studies. Though she had been easily adaptable when she was young. Either way, he couldn't help but worry.

(Is the Dojo ok?)

Leerin was the oldest in the orphanage now. The orphanage should be all right since people from nearby orphanages would come and help. Besides, Leerin had already left the place when she went to study.

She said she had applied for leave in her school at Grendan. Everything could be solved once she obtained proof from Zuellni and took her exams for the next grade. But something still felt.....

(Is this okay?)

"What?" It was Leerin.

"Uh, nothing," he shook his head vaguely.

(But.....)

What was it? He wasn't sure. He just felt..... Something..... He felt..... hard to concentrate.

"What happened?"

"Really, nothing," he cocked his head at her, shaking his head. His vague expression made her angry.

"Ok, then hurry up and get changed," Sharnid said. Everybody moved.

They didn't have school and training today. They just came here for a fun day.

"We should enjoy some fun," Sharnid said excitedly as he waved his hand. This was three days ago after training in the training room.

Nina made a face at the word "fun". For her, who enjoyed training, even if she acknowledged a holiday, she wouldn't acknowledge "fun". Felli's reaction was cold from a corner. Seemed like she was about to say "what a fool". Dalshena's expression was similar. Sharnid hadn't directed his question to Naruki at all. It appeared she might need to learn how to react to this senpai.

Layfon was thinking of how to react to him.

"Yes, yes," Harley agreed. "It's already summer. The lake will be opened."

"If we want to swim, we can always swim in the pool."

"Stupid!" Nina said.

Sharnid reproved her angrily. "We can't let this sealed space suppress our youth."

"Wh.....!"

"Blue sky, glaring sun, hot sand. We can only release the colors of our youth at that place."

"Oh!" Harley was the only person to agree. Everyone else was uninterested.

"..... Truth be told, I think sometimes we need rest. It's not bad to go once a while," Sharnid said solemnly, perhaps realizing the atmosphere around him.

Nina sighed. "True. We've just been training."

"Yes, holidays are important too, whether they are for the heart or the body."

"Your motivation doesn't seem pure, but, never mind. That suggestion is fine."

"Good~~"

..... As such, team 17 had gone on a holiday. This might explain why Sharnid's emotions were stronger than usual.

"Layfon, what is this. This spiritless swimsuit?" Sharnid reproached him when he came out of the changing room.

"A swimsuit doesn't have a spirit....." he said, feeling troubled as he looked at his swimsuit. It was a fairly normal piece.

Sharnid's swimsuit was the same style as Kirik's. It fitted him, but it was too tight.

"Oh, oh, my forest is ready for anything. Don't give me too passionate a gaze."

"Ah, just what's this situation? Besides, when did I get intimate with you? Be careful of what you say."

"Ho, beauty is honed by curves."

Not knowing what to say, Layfon moved his gaze away from him. Nina and the girls emerged from the changing room.

Females usually took longer to change, but since both the male and female changing rooms were full, it took them about the same amount of time to get changed.

Nina took the lead. Next came Naruki, Mifi, Meishen and Leerin, chatting as they walked. Felli was the last one, as if hiding behind the girls.

"Look, Layfon. The female team is so imposing."

"Ha....."

Urged by Sharnid, Layfon observed their swimsuits. True, they suited their owners' personalities.

"Don't you find them beautiful?" Sharnid said in a small voice.

"Ha....." Layfon's reply wasn't keen at all.

"The light hidden by the uniform is now in bloom. What do you think? It shines, doesn't it? Don't you think this is what the light of youth is like?"

"Ha....."

"..... Why are you so listless?"

"I don't quite know how to swim."

"Swim? You planned to swim?"

"Eh, isn't that what we're doing?"

"You..... How do you want me to explain to you what youth is? From the start? Or a folk tale first?"

"What folk tale can explain youth?"

Sharnid hugged his head.

"Really.... Listen up! The place of physical contact that guys and girls can't usually touch. That's the place! The interaction between adults. We're standing on the boundary that can get us beyond the usual boy-girl relationship."

"So..... this is the limit?"

"Of course, or do you prefer seeing their underwear beneath their uniforms more?"

"Not, not at all!"

"Right. Then let's feel the beauty now! And look. Look." he turned Layfon's head around.

The girls were criticizing each other's swimsuit.

"Don't you think they made a serious choice in choosing their swimsuits?"

"Uh..... They're pretty."

"You can perceive emotions, so look more troubled."

"Look more troubled....."

"In other words, desire for the flesh. What do you think?"

"It's not good to be so direct."

"Listen up, three desires exist between guys and girls. One of them is lust. That's because of the nervous system....."

"Please don't suddenly discuss such a serious topic."

"I'm always serious..... Anyway, this is the end of the boy-girl relationship. Humans can treat it as happiness. All hail humans. Got it?"

"I don't get anything you just said."

"Really, just what do you want me to say?"

Layfon thought Sharnid's words were quite problematic, but he couldn't quite put his finger on why.

"Really, look. Nina even worn that, though she's as slow as you. "

But Nina's sports style swimsuit was very common.

"That fool! I'm not saying you have to wear something unexpected. Listen up....."

While Sharnid was speaking.....

"What're you doing? Everyone's waiting."

"Ah, sorry, Shena....." he cut himself off.

Because Layfon's head was lightly bent, he first saw her feet. Sharnid was probably the same. Above the delicate toes were her

calves that had gone through training. Next came the thighs that looked to be pretty bouncy. The V-shaped swimsuit showed her curves.

Sharnid wanted to say something but..... He got cut off.

"What?" she frowned at his suspicious look.

"Ah, no. I want to ask what do you want to do?"

She seemed to get his original intention. Her frown deepened. " Nothing much about "what did I come to do"? I came to swim."

Goggles sat on her head. A white swim cap for the purpose of racing hid her golden hair. Of course, that cap failed to cover all of her hair, letting some hair loose down her back.

"I don't like to do nothing even though we're here to have fun. I'm going ahead for a swim," she left him looking confused, and headed for the beach.

"Uh, Layfon, you get it now?" he asked, watching her leave.

"Um..... A bit."

"Yeah?" Sharnid said, feeling down.

Layfon headed for the beach too.

And their holiday began.

A large area of the lake was opened up for swimming. There was a beach, and the area for swimming wasn't particularly deep. The depth of the off-limits area was the height of two grown men put together. Canoes were provided along with other swimming gear. Target practices for water shooting could be seen on the opposite shore. There were also people who just relaxed on the beach to sunbathe. Men who chatted with others, girls who waited for guys to walk up to them..... All kinds of people were here today.

Layfon was waiting for everyone in the restaurant "Home of the Lake" near the beach. This building had no walls, so everything inside could be seen from the outside. Tables were arranged in rows, and deeper inside the shop was the kitchen. The shop owner had put in several life buoys. Some beach umbrellas were also there for rent.

Layfon sat on the edge of the raised floor, dangling his feet above the sand with nothing to do. Harley and Kirik were watching the luggage on the beach. Layfon saw them discussing something in their notes when he went to deliver some drinks to them. Nina and Dalshena seemed to be competing over swimming . He could see them clearly, though they were in the off-limits area. Sharnid had gone to do something else for a change of mood. Who knew where he had gone off to. Leerin, Meishen, Naruki and Mifi were playing in the water. Felli.....

"You found a nice place," Felli said, suddenly sitting beside him as she drank from the cool drink in her hand. She had her jacket spread on her back. "It's so hot. I don't get why they still want to play."

"It must be more comfortable in the water."

"Fon Fon?"

"I don't quite know how to swim," he said, moving his gaze away from her.

(Sharnid senpai.....)

All because of the strange things that Sharnid had said, thus making Layfon think strange thoughts. He felt something looking at Felli's mouth as she drank. Many things had happened in the past three months. Many things had happened, but he couldn't quite remember them. He thought of them as accidents and that was why he forgot them. In fact, he did forget about them until this day came. What Sharnid said had made him recall the past.

Felli was wearing her swimsuit with her jacket covering her back and her breasts. A swimsuit with a little flower pattern. As she hadn't done up the buttons of the jacket, Layfon could see her stomach. Very white skin. The second piece of her swimsuit was in the style of a skirt that covered her waist and more. Her sandal-covered feet swung back and forth.

Felli was so delicate. Thinking of that, he remembered that he had carried her a few times.

(Ahhh, no, no, wait, don't think.....)

At the time during training for the intercity match, and at the time in the ruined city. Those scenes surfaced in his mind.

"What is it?"

".... No, nothing," he said, hugging his head and stopping himself from thinking more, yet it failed.... The feeling of Felli's light weight in his arms, the feeling of when he took hold of her legs, the feeling when she sat on his shoulders....

(Ahhhhhhh!)

"Are you all right?"

"I'm all..... all right."

"Do you feel unwell? You've been forcing yourself lately. What happened....."

"No. Really. Nothing!"

Stop my memory! He prayed with all of his concentration. But at that time....

"Ah, exercise really is great. Felli, you're not going to swim? This is a good chance for some practice."

"No way."

"Practice is great so that you don't drown."

Nina and Dalshena had returned.

"Uh? What's with Layfon?"

"Ah, no....." he lifted his head and his gaze met Nina's.

(Aa.....)

More memories surfaced. The time when he was at Nina and Leerin's place. Nina fainted and.....

(No, no. That was an accident. Accident. Accident. Accident!)

But.....

"You look strange."

"Layfon, if you feel unwell....." Nina put her hand on his forehead.

(Wu!)

Her action brought her breasts before him.

(Wuwu.....)

Everything that happened on that day jumped out to him. He had wrapped her with the swimming bag that day for the race.....

(As I said, it was an accident!)

"No fever, but your face is really red. Are you ok?"

"Ah, well, just a little....!"

When her hand left his forehead, he seized the chance to stand up and walk past her. But two more figures appeared in his path and made him halt.

"What? What's wrong?"

Leerin and Meishen were back.

"Layfon looks strange," Nina explained.

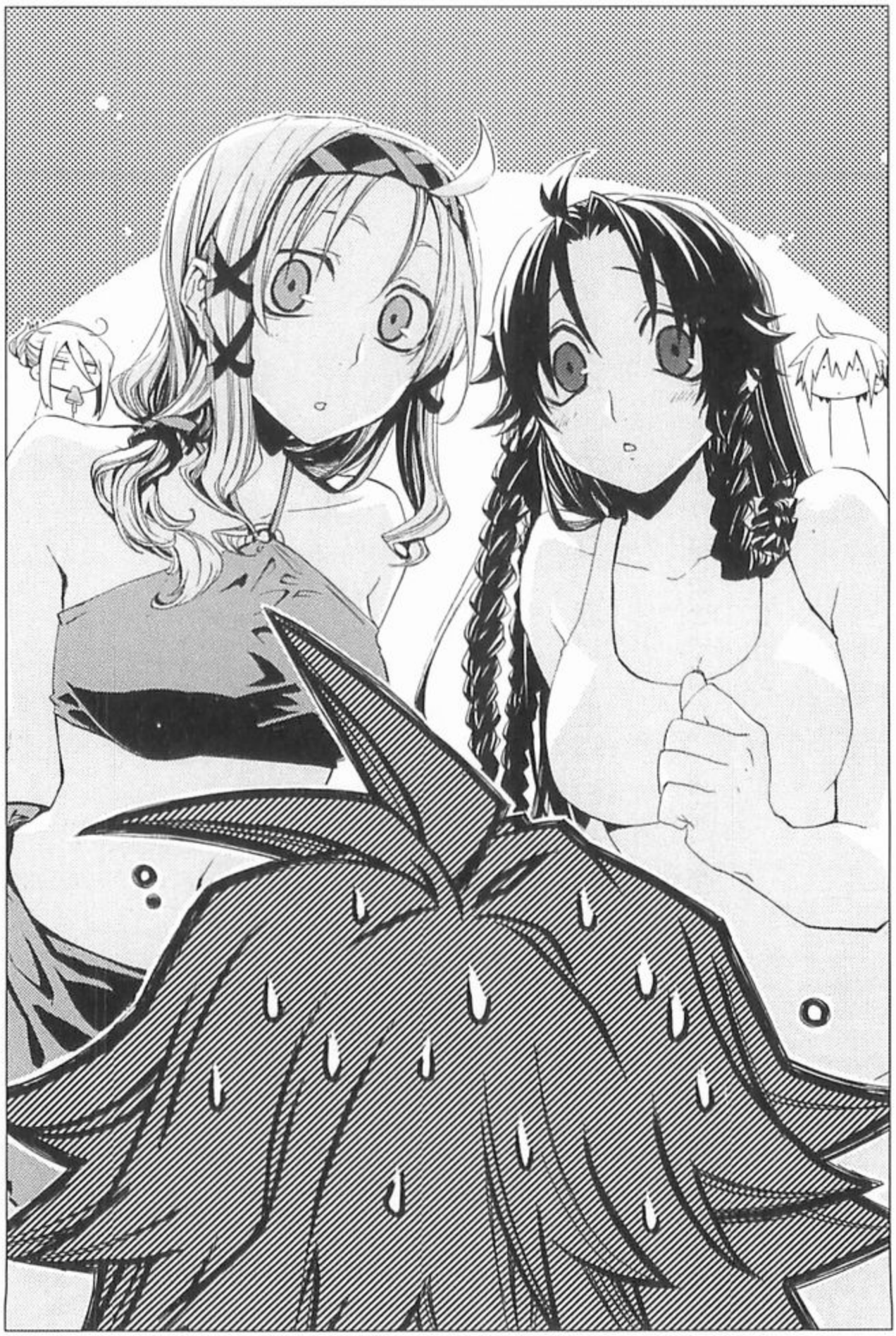
"Eh?"

Both girls looked worried.

"Layfon?"

"Are you all right?"

Both girls walked up to him to confirm his situation, bringing their faces close to him.



(Ahah, again.....)

That scene flashed past him. On that day at Grendan's bus station, a place filled with rumbling. Leerin's teary eyes....

"Ah....."

This moment when he made a voice without knowing.

"Eh?"

He seemed to hear someone's voice. Along with a feeling that rushed up to his brain, he fainted.

In the end, he fainted with a reddened face.

"So what happened?"

They put him underneath an umbrella. Originally they intended to send him to the hospital, but Sharnid had stopped them.

"He's burnt."

Burnt? As in a heatstroke?

"Not sure."

Though he was flippant, Sharnid wasn't the type of guy who would leave someone in a life and death situation. Since he said Layfon was all right, he probably would be all right then.

"Even so..... I still don't get it," Nina said.

Leerin and Meishen stayed behind to look after Layfon. Dalshena went swimming again. And Sharnid had gone with her. Naruki and Mifi went to do something else. Felli stayed at "Home of the Lake" to read her book. Nina had nothing to do and nowhere to go.

"That's difficult....."

It felt strange that she had nowhere to go on a beach so full of people. She looked around. She wanted to look after Layfon with Leerin and Meishen, but she felt it was difficult to just sit there with them.

Wearing sand-covered sandals, she walked along the beach aimlessly, enjoying the sun and the sand. She saw various groups of boys and girls on the beach. There were couples around too. Though they were all students at Zuellni, Nina didn't know all of them. She did, however, come across a few familiar faces. Some of them were with the same gender, some came with their lovers.

"Um."

Nina's gaze suddenly stopped on the couple that had walked past her.

"Ah."

"Ah."

She didn't immediately recognize her because she looked different than usual. Leu looked at her with an "oh no" expression. Leu lived in the same dormitory as Nina, and they were once classmates in first year. Nina recognized the guy beside her. Someone from Military Arts who seemed to be also in the same class in first year.

"Come over here for a sec....." Leu took Nina's hand and pulled her away.

"Wh, what?" Nina said in a fluster.

"How should I put it.....Well....."

Leu frowned, not knowing how to say what she wanted to say. Her hands seemed directionless. She seemed to want to push something up before her eyes and suddenly realized that the glasses weren't there. Glasses were inconvenient since she was here to swim.

"That's why you refused the invitation. I see. In that case, it'd have been better if you just said so before," Nina said.

"No. It isn't like that. No....."

"I heard from Selina."

"Wu. Ah. Really!" Leu moaned. It was rare for her to be in a fluster when she was usually cold and calm.

"Never mind. It's nothing even though Nina knows..... Nothing. Nothing at all!"

"Why are you angry?"

"No, I'm not angry," she lowered her head.

Nina didn't understand why her emotions fluctuated so much. Speaking aside, Selina had seemed to be hiding something when she mentioned that Leu had a boyfriend.

(Because she's shy?)

Perhaps. Perhaps so. Nina could only guess, since she herself didn't have a boyfriend.

"Uh?"

Nina cocked her head. Leu was laughing in a bad way.

"What is it?"

"You came here with the platoon, right? How come you're alone ?"

"Ah.....Nothing."

"......Isn't that answer a bit too forced?"

"Nah, Layfon fainted."

"Again?" Leu asked. "He can faint. Is his body that weak?"

"Not really..... He seems to be burnt."

"Burnt?"

"Ah. What happened? It isn't a heatstroke though."

"Uh.....Ah, perhaps."

"What? Thought of something?"

"Not really.....only.....No, perhaps....." She studied Nina. "Um... ...It's not bad. Your muscles aren't that thick."

"What're you saying?"

Leu ignored her and touched her arm and leg.

"Hey, what're you doing?"

"Your muscles aren't that bad. Just a little bit hard. Your stomach doesn't have any unnecessary meat."

"What're you touching?"

"Nah. I think it'd be interesting if he fainted because of your charm."

"Ha?"

Charm?

"What're you saying?"

"Wrong. You shouldn't be asking me with such a serious expression. You should blush."

"No, as I was saying....."

"Hey, do you know you're a girl?"

"Of course."

"I sometimes wonder whether you might think of yourself as a man."

"Stupid."

"Then why do you not blush?"

Even so, that would be hard for her.

Nina knew what Leu meant now, but she might not be the only reason even if Layfon fainted because of a lady's charm. At that time, Felli, Leerin, Meishen and Dalshena had been around him. All of them were beauties. Sharnid would probably cry with joy.

She understood Layfon's fainting had nothing to do with her own charm.

"Well, I don't know. Besides, mens' interests aren't the same."

"But."

"Well, for example. Don't you find it hard to accept? Don't you find it strange if a guy you find revolting actually has a pretty girlfriend? Hard to accept, right? Don't you think that girl has done something against nature?"

"I don't think so....."

"Right. Then perhaps Layfon likes your type of a girl."

"Wu....."

"That's right. Since it's rare to get to relax, don't stand here. Go do something fun," Leu said. "Ah....."

"What're you thinking? It must be something bad."

Leu went back to her boyfriend. Her good point was her ability to tell Nina what to do while holding an indifferent attitude. But now..... Would Layfon like Nina's type?

"Wu....." She stayed rooted on the spot, troubled.

They had barbecue for dinner, and it was dusk when they finished eating. The number of people on the beach had increased. Some had set up stalls along the beach. Layfon and the others changed into their clothes and went to check out the stalls.

"So many people," Leerin said with a sigh.

"Yes," Layfon said with a sigh too.

"What, what? You don't see this much? It's just a normal summer festival," Mifi said.

"We don't have many summers in Grendan."

"Ah, just three times."

"And we didn't have huge festivals."

"Just at the beginning of the New Year. It was grand, but all other smaller events were done within small areas."

"Wa, so old-fashioned."

"Are there many festivals in Joeldem?" Leerin asked.

"Many. The Electronic Fairy Festival is on every single season....."

"Really."

"Joeldem must be rich."

Mifi began to explain Joeldem's festivals to them. Both of them sighed at hearing other festivals.

"Though I thought of it when I came to Zuellni, Grendan really is very poor," Layfon said.

"What? You only found out now?" Leerin said. "It's always fighting. It shouldn't have that much money."

"Ah, I see."

"Geez, you should use your brain. It's the same whether it's money at home or money used to run a country."

"Ah, only Leerin would think of that though."

The two of them continued to admire the stalls as they argued.

"Oi, it's almost time," Sharnid said, checking his watch. "Hurry."

"But all the good seats are taken now," Dalshena protested.

"Not really. We can just use our brains more, and that's what makes it meaningful," he said.

Light blossomed.

"Wa.....So pretty."

Fireworks lit up the sky above the quiet lake. Leerin sighed at the imaginary flowers that were blossoming above her.

"They use real fireworks in formal situations. The sound would be very loud. As expected, we don't have the budget and the technology," Nina said to Leerin, who looked unhappy.

White and red light painted Leerin's face. The fireworks were only images projected in the sky.

"That must be done by the Message Team. I saw them recruiting a short while ago."

"Ah, those guys are cutting corners this year."

Harley and Kirik. Though Kirik had pointed out the weakness of this year's fireworks, he cheered like everyone else under the grand decoration of the fake fireworks.

"Use your brain.....This is what you mean?" Dalshena looked around, not interested. They were on the roof of a research building. It usually banned normal students from entering, but the research students were here appreciating the fireworks.

"Huh, still can't quite see it clearly," Meishen smiled bitterly. Naruki looked uncomfortable.

"Sorry," she said.

"No worries. We're in a festival. You've been busy this year too. You don't have much time to relax and rest. Take this opportunity to enjoy your time," Sharnid said.

"Yes, yes," Naruki said in a small voice to Meishen.

"Look, you're making it difficult for the first years, doing whatever you like," Dalshena glared at him.

"No one wouldn't want to be the guy that girls can rely on. The problem is just how the opposite gender thinks."

"What. Are they in that kind of relationship?" Dalshena understood now.

"I'm happy to have you rely on me."

"Not in my life."

"So mean," he shrugged.

She glared at him. Her gaze then alleviated.

"But, great suggestion for the holidays."

"Isn't it? Youth is short. Summer is even shorter. It'd have been a waste if we didn't enjoy it."

"I don't mean that. I mean Nina."

Nina often sank into contemplation recently with a serious expression. Though she hid that expression once she noticed someone looking at her, she had failed to escape Dalshena's eyes. Dalshena didn't know what she was contemplating. The busy schedule of the recent Military Arts Competition was a timely relief for the Captain. However, that limit was close to its breaking point. Dalshena feared something might happen, and that was exactly the time when Sharnid made his suggestion.

"Well, that person's too passionate."

"Passionate?"

"Her brain gets heated up. She needs to cool down before she loses control," he said and smiled, thinking of something. "Every day is so hot. Other symptoms might just explode together."

"Your joke isn't funny," she said. Her expression turned lonely. " That guy would probably look bitter if he heard this foolish talk."

"What? Thought of something?"

"You can't tell what it is?"

"Who knows," he turned his face away.

"At least, I don't have the right to sympathize with him."

"Sympathy. He'd probably hate it."

"Perhaps."

They lifted their gazes to the fireworks, thinking of their still unconscious friend.

Meishen and Mifi watched the two of them from behind. "And that is the injury between the two of them."

"Is, is that so?" Meishen said, confused.

They couldn't hear the conversation from here, and eavesdropping wasn't good. But she felt like the lonely scene of the two of them watching the fireworks really resembled a painting.

"This adult-like feeling is too much for Mei."

"Uu....."

That must be it since it came from Mifi.

"Then let's use a more direct method. Contact. Direct and enthusiastic body contact!"

"......Wait, don't you find what you're saying strange?"

"There's no other way though."

Meishen's face must be very red. She wanted to stop Mifi but she still looked at the direction she was pointing.

At where Layfon and Leerin were watching the fireworks together. Perhaps they weren't used to watching fireworks. The two of them looked at the sky like little kids.

"You have to show something of yourself like the fireworks."

"Eh?"

"If you can't do that, then it'll never come to you. Look over there."

She followed Mifi's direction again. Felli and Nina were standing somewhere not too far from Layfon and Leerin. A distance that wasn't too far or too close to the other two. A distance that allowed them to speak to the other pair at any moment.

"Look, they're waiting too. You're also thinking of pushing them away, pushing Leerin away and wrapping your arm around his. That kind of an initiative."

"No, I can't."

That was too much for her. But.....

(Wu.....)

But she should be able to take up her courage again. That was what Meishen thought. She knew she was weak, and that troubled her every time she thought of it. She could only be like this because she was born timid. But if she could have more courage...

"What, Mei. Your face is red."

"No, nothing."

But she could only blush and think, imagining herself in that place as she looked at Layfon and Leerin. And self-hatred rushed up in her, knowing she could only imagine and not do anything.

(I want courage.) She thought as she watched Leerin. She felt like everything would end in the blink of an eye.

Nina walked with exhaustion. Students filled the tram station, waiting for a tram to take them home. Layfon and the others planned to walk a little before parting to head home. Dalshena and Sharnid decided to just walk home. Naruki and her friends stayed back at the tram station, saying they wanted to get back faster. Harley and Kirik returned to the lab.

That left Layfon with Nina, Felli and Leerin. At first, Layfon and Leerin talked from one thing to another. This was their first time experiencing the fireworks of summer. They were really happy,

and Nina's expression softened as she watched them. Felli wasn't as indifferent as before. She didn't keep her distance but instead, she showed interest in joining the conversation. But by then everyone had quieted down.

(Too tired?)

Only Leerin wasn't a Military Artist. She had a full day, and she had also swam. She must be reaching her limit now.

(Let's not force her. We'll take the tram at the next station.) Felli thought.

Though Felli was a Psychokinesist, her physical strength wasn't as strong as Nina and Layfon's. However, she did do training, so she was in better shape than Leerin. Even so, she felt uneasy with her current steps. As she thought, the next station was her limit.

The station appeared soon, and that was the parting point for them. Nina and Leerin lived in the same dormitory, while Layfon and Felli lived in the same suburb. Felli heard a light sigh when they were about to reach the station.

"Right, let's take the tram here," Nina suggested.

Layfon nodded.

".....Sorry, please wait," Leerin said, stopping.

"What is it?"

The streetlight didn't reach her face, so the others couldn't make out her expression. Was she not well because of her tiredness? Should Felli have taken the bags? But Leerin had insisted on carrying it.

"I have something to say to Layfon," Leerin said, her hand on the bag on her shoulder.

"Ah, then we'll....." Nina said, feeling the unusual atmosphere.

It had been three months since Leerin arrived at Zuellni. But she had not once said why she was here. Academy Cities had fewer encounters with filth monsters, so they were safer than other cities. But in truth, Nina witnessed a ruined city on her way to Zuellni, and filth monsters did attack Zuellni recently. The journey on a roaming bus was unsafe, yet Leerin had traveled all the way here. Why? Many people should have already asked her directly or indirectly, but she kept diverting the conversation. This time, she was going to say it.

Nina swallowed, feeling the tension. It felt different from when she was in battle. It was a feeling of knowing she shouldn't be here . She exchanged a glance with Felli. The other girl was also hesitating.

"No. I want you to hear too. I want you to hear because you understand Layfon, the Military Artist whom I don't quite understand."

"Uh.....um."

".....ok."

Layfon waited with a tense expression too.

"Layfon....."

"Uh....."

Leerin watched him as if confirming he really was him.

".....When I read the letter that you wanted to stay as a Military Artist, I was relieved."

"Eh?"

"You wrote that in the letter. Though I was happy and troubled, I was happy that you told me you wanted to stay a Military Artist. I've always thought of you as a Military Artist. It feels like if you're not a Military Artist, then you're not the Layfon that I know. Then you'd have disappeared, and I would really hate that feeling."

"Leerin....."

"But I thought about it. If I reunited with Layfon, observed him well and saw that he was actually an unwilling Military Artist, then he should stop. Zuellni's circumstances are irrelevant. I'm not a Military Artist, but I've heard father's stories, so I understand the cruelty of battles. If that is really how Layfon feels, then there will definitely be nothing good that will come from being a Military Artist."

Her words nailed Nina's heart. She didn't want Layfon to fight again, yet he did, all because of the lack of maturity in the Military Artists here. All because she herself was too useless. She had thought of this many times, but who helped her climb back to her feet? Layfon. Who helped her to make her stronger? Layfon.

In Nina's eyes, she could do nothing to catch up to Layfon's strength. The term "help" probably meant nothing much to him. Because no one could catch up to him.....They could only rely on him.

Leerin's hand reached into the bag. "But it turns out Layfon isn't really unwilling. I don't know how Layfon feel about this, but you've never worn the face of being unwilling. And that is really great."

"It's not like I've given up leav-....."

"Un, even so, that's okay. Because at least I know, for Layfon, being a Military Artist is not an impossible choice."

"Leerin....."

"So, to the present Layfon..... No, it's because you're you now, that I think this is essential to you."

She took out something from the bag. It was a thin, long box, wrapped in a piece of clean cloth adorned with gold and silver

threads. A crest was carved into the cover of the box. Nina didn't know what was inside it. She glanced at Layfon and saw him frozen with shock.

"This is....."

"Father has already forgiven you. And he feels he owes you, so he hopes you can accept this."

Father.....Nina recalled the school of Psyharden. Layfon sealed those techniques of his but Haia had always been using those Katana skills. She didn't know what was inside the box. Did Leerin want Layfon to pick up the Katana? Or was it because Layfon had greatly improved, so? He had become stronger than before? In that case.....

But Layfon quietly shook his head.

"I'm sorry. I can't take this."

The events that happened after that night were like raging waves. It was very hard to make sense of them.

Chapter 2 - Enemy

The information had arrived yesterday morning.

Delbone's power of Psychokinesis could discover almost any nearby filth monsters one week before the city came across their paths. However, this time the filth monsters had an excellent ability to search out their enemies.

"Then what about their fighting power?" Cauntia squinted happily as she stood on the edge of Grendan. Her waist-long white hair fluttered in the strong wind. She wore the long coat that only a Heaven's Blade Successor was given. The coat covered her body and cut her off from the pollutants in the air. The coat was surprisingly light, allowing her to move freely in it. As such, the coat fully revealed her delicate body. Her waist was high and her arms and legs were long. Only the word "grand" could be used to describe this body. She held a large weapon that had a long and thick handle and a wide and big blade. The head of a dragon decorated the place connecting the blade and the handle, as if the blade was about to shoot flame. The Green Dragon Crescent Moon Sabre, this was her weapon. It was a huge weapon with an imposing pressure alleviated by the small charm decorating the blade.

"Aren't you excited for this?" she turned around, her red painted lips revealing the joy in her. A scar from her forehead to her chin cut through her beautiful face. She smiled like a little girl.

"Your presence is too heavy."

Unlike Cauntia, a calm face met her gaze. That person stood alone and he was only half as tall as Cauntia. However, his head, eyes, mouth, nose were all big in proportion. His arms and legs were short, giving off a feeling of a large kid. His skin was smooth and his face was round like a sticky rice cake.

"What is it, Reverse? You're as down as ever."

"This is war. Of course my feelings are heavy."

Cauntia put her hands on her hips and sighed at his timid attitude. "We can never come to a consensus at this point. Why can't you listen to my opinion at times?"

"That means you'll have to agree to my opinion."

Silence.

"Impossible!" said both at the same time.

Cauntia laughed, Reverse smiled without hesitation.

"But, don't worry. I'll protect you," he said in a small voice.

Unable to suppress herself, she gave him a hug and put her lips on his reddened cheek.

"Then let's observe today's prey," she said as if speaking to her love.

Both were Heaven's Blade Successors put in the same group. They were now strengthening their vision to confirm their prey. An unusual thing that was the size of a lion was closing in on Grendan from 30 Jimels away.

"It's given up its wings."

"It looks quite old."

The things on the lion's back had become two small hills. This filth monster was in a matured phase. It was massive enough to give up its wings since flying took up lots of strength.

"It's worth hunting down," Cauntia said, licking her lips.

Reverse's shoulders shook. "It looks powerful, and it looks hard."

"I don't mean that. How far can we cut it down? Hohoho, this feels like usual, but different from the time when we took our first filth monster. Compared to giving it the last push, this is so much more boring. Anyway, this is just a job."

"I was tense at first too."

The filth monster dashed towards Grendan, shortening the distance with shocking speed. The feeling of distance crumbled with a closer look.

"Let's get rid of it with our usual combo," she said lightly.

Reverse gave a stiff nod. The two of them put on their helmets and readied their fighting stances. Cauntia confirmed the part connecting Reverse's helmet to his armour. The design of his coat differed from hers. Plates of alloys covered several parts of the coat . The coat and the helmet made him look like a metallic doll. Even Military Artists would find it hard to move with that weight on them.

High speed was the best strategy. Reverse's equipment didn't seem appropriate in a life and death fight against filth monsters. On the contrary, Cauntia's light equipment seemed more suitable. However, the female Heaven's Blade's equipment wasn't the best at defense. The destruction of the surroundings during a fight could cause scattering stones and rocks to tear apart the coat. Pollutants would enter the body once the protective coat was damaged, and that pain, though tolerable psychologically, would bring down movement speed. And a Military Artist whose movements slowed down would face death. Either he died by the filth monster's hand, or he died on the way back to the city, his body eaten up by pollutants.

However, Reverse and Cauntia were Reverse and Cauntia. That was why they were given permission to wear such gear. He focused on defense and she focused on the offensive. These equipments were specially made to cater to their combination.

"Don't worry, I'll always protect you."

They gazed at each other. Cauntia smiled a bitter smile.

"Thanks. I can do my best because you're here."

"Same here."

Their interaction showed they knew each other very well. This was a special combination among Heaven's Blades. The two of them walked their own paths but were able to perfectly cater to each other.

"Then let's begin the hunt."

"Come."

They entered the battlefield. Just the two of them, as before.

Why am I....

Felli felt her present situation was unreasonable. Why did her stomach hurt so much?

It had been one week since that event. Layfon was unhappy for the whole week. He and Leerin had a huge fight after he refused to accept the box. It was shocking at first. Felli and Nina never

thought Leerin, who was gently persuading him to accept the box, would suddenly turn rough. By the time Nina and Felli came to their senses, it was too late to stop the fight. There was no room for them to put in a word. They could only listen with a feeling that they shouldn't be there, and then they watched Leerin run away in anger.

So Nina ran after Leerin and Felli ran after Layfon. That couldn't be helped, since they lived in different areas.

Layfon waited for her, and they walked to the next tram station in silence. She felt that she had to stand by his side, and she wanted that too, but this time Layfon was wrong. Leerin..... She took the long and dangerous journey to come to Zuellni. Perhaps all the students here would criticize Layfon for this, since everyone had once sat on the small and narrow roaming bus, facing the danger of being attacked anytime by filth monsters.

But that wasn't the problem. All students came here for themselves, no matter how different their purposes were. Leerin was different. She came here for Layfon's sake, yet he failed to express any gratitude.

Felli's feelings leaned towards Leerin, and she didn't feel unhappy with that. Layfon was in the wrong, and what Leerin said was right. In that case, she had to do something about this. Leerin wanted Felli and Nina to listen too so they could judge the situation. As a normal person, she wanted Military Artists, such as Felli and Nina, to be the judge in this matter. The two of them knew Layfon as fellow Military Artists.

Felli felt Leerin was right.

"This isn't Grendan!" Leerin had confirmed this point again and again in the fight.

Felli thought she was right but Layfon didn't want to hear it. He kept saying this was his punishment, so he couldn't accept it.

Leerin was here so as to allow him to accept that box. But.....

"Then I'm leaving first," he said and closed the door of the training room.

The members left in the room sighed as they heard his footsteps retreat further away.

Ahhh, her stomach hurt. She put her hand on her stomach.

"..... His mood hasn't changed," Harley said, tired.

Sharnid had already left. At first, everyone was worried, but now they felt tired of the situation.

"I never thought he could get mad like that," Nina said.

"He always thought it's his punishment. Since she's nailed him, even he would turn stubborn," Dalshena sighed. "Compared to that, that guy's been hiding such strength..... Geez, unbelievable."

"But I don't think he'll become so much more powerful if he uses a Katana," Harley responded. He pointed at the terminal which showed the data of Layfon's three Dites: Sapphire Dite, Shim Adamantium Dite, Adamantium Dite.

"Forget his movements when using a weapon. There shouldn't be much difference just from the qualities of the sword and a Katana."

"What do you mean?" Nina asked.

"Of course, a Katana's cut path is more prominent but we can't say a sword can't cut as well as a Katana, since technology is improving," he showed the cut path on the screen. "But Layfon is more suited to using a Katana. That's Kirik's opinion. His moves are all variations of the Katana technique. And by using a Katana, he can maximize his power in his basic moves. The damages to the Shim Adamantium Dite would be less than to the sword, and that's probably the same for his body."

"Um....."

Nina's expression turned heavy at what Harley said: the burden on the body.

"But I heard that he became a Heaven's Blade Successor at age 10. He stopped using the Katana at that time, maybe his body's grown used to handling a sword?" Dalshena said.

"Perhaps," Harley said. "I'm not a doctor so I can't say much. But looking from the viewpoint of a technician, a Katana suits him better. He wouldn't have to force himself and shoulder any additional burden. The data here proves it," he pressed a key on the keyboard.

Sword and Katana. Felli didn't know the difference between them. As a Psychokinesist, it was natural to use the staff Dite. She had no other choice. Even so, the difference in the shape of the flakes could affect the conductivity of Psychokinesis and the movement of the flake in the air current. Though she wasn't too keen in the fights, she often requested adjustments for the Dite so she could use the weapon freely.

"He doesn't seem to care much about the adjustments of the Dite. I don't mean he's just confident in his own strength though. He remembers the exact data for the Steel Threads setting."

"Is that so?" Nina said, surprised.

"Yes, as expected, he's only like this when it comes to the sword. He doesn't care much about the Dite that would mean life and death for him. He's probably an exception among so many Military Artists."

"Um....."

Felli cocked her head at Nina's unusual movement.

"I..... I don't have anything to complain about my Dite," Nina said, about to sweat from agitation.

Harley gave her a bitter smile. "Of course, my dad and I have always been looking after your Dite."

"Harley, do you like the Captain?" Felli asked, holding a mop.

"What!?" he said in a high-pitched voice.

Felli was in charge of cleaning today. After vacuuming the place , she took up the mop and started brushing the floor. She asked Harley the question as she felt something from him in the conversation. He had been humming while tidying the equipment.

The two of them were alone.

"You, what did you say?"

The equipment fell everywhere. Harley looked at her in shock as if he was about to fall too.

"I felt it from the conversation."

"Aaa..... I suppose," he admitted.

His unexpectedly honest admission surprised her.

"Ah, but that was in the past. It doesn't mean anything now."

"Is that so?"

"She was my first love. Well, she was the most beautiful of all the girls that I knew. Now she's got short hair, but her hair was long back then. And she was dressed like a lady. None of the girls back then could catch up to her. You can say that was my first time understanding the charm of a woman."

"It feels like you're deliberately complicating the explanation and hiding something."

"Wu."

"You really don't feel anything now?"

"Yes. I can't feel from her what I felt before. We're just childhood friends."

"Really."

"Perhaps not. Either way, we've been together for a long time. Forget that we're different in gender. I got used to her because of the long time, or you can say that I don't want to see her other side. "

"Then....."

"I don't want to treat her from the angle of a male. It's different from being a lover. But I don't despise Nina because she's female."

"Ha....." She nodded, half understanding what he said. This was what childhood friends were like.

"Though I don't know what others think, Nina is like that. I'm used to the present Nina. I find it hard to accept, thinking of Nina acting all lady-like in front of her boyfriend."

"... Meaning you aren't gonna improve your relationship with her?"

"That's the way it is with a boy-girl relationship. As a friend, Military Artist or Dite technician, that relationship doesn't matter."

Was this feeling special for Harley, or did it apply to all childhood friends? Felli didn't understand since she didn't have one.

"Not good enough for research purposes."

Nina and Harley, Layfon and Leerin. They were all childhood friends with each other but weren't their personalities different? Felli didn't know what Layfon thought of it, but she knew Leerin wanted to have a relationship that went beyond that of childhood friends. Otherwise, she wouldn't have come all the way to Zuellni. And Felli felt that she herself had lost on that single point.

If it was herself, she wouldn't have done it. Would she have taken on a dangerous journey for the sake of another person? She

probably wouldn't have chased after him. She would have stayed home and prayed for his safe return.

She had lost to Leerin just by thinking like that even though she didn't want to admit it. Even though she didn't want to feel sad, even though she didn't want to admit she had lost.

"..... Forget that though," she said to herself as she headed home alone.

She couldn't leave the matter as it was. She must do something, but what? Should she help alleviate that stiffness between them first? But that wouldn't help to reach Leerin's goal. She had to do something to resolve Leerin's problem. Besides, Harley had just said something that bothered her.

"Ah, yes. There might be one more reason why Layfon doesn't care much about the settings of the Dite," Harley said, embarrassed by the conversation about Nina and so said something else to divert her.

"What?"

"Layfon tried the Katana in here and destroyed it. It wasn't a good Dite since I made it quickly."

"Ha....."

"But the investigation on the Dite showed Layfon had used too much Kei compared to usual. I think he couldn't control it because he was using Karen Kei."

She didn't understand what he meant.

"Meaning the usual Layfon pays attention to the level of Kei he uses. It's not just the sword or the Katana. He isn't used to the material that made the Dite, so the Adamantium Dite probably wouldn't have worked."

Harley thought to himself that Layfon's results had fueled the research students' enthusiasm for researching new materials. Layfon was such a monster. And that had added a few more questions about the Heaven's Blade that a Heaven's Blade Successor used.

"Really, what should I do?" Felli sighed deeply.

Someone else was also sighing right now. The creepy sound of vegetables being chopped in the kitchen gave Nina a hard time sitting still. Leerin was making dinner. She had taken charge of the kitchen since she moved in, and Selina, the person in charge of the dormitory, had then reduced Leerin's rent.

Anyway, Leerin was now alone in the kitchen. Though Nina wanted to say something, she felt it hard to approach the other girl for now. She paced near the door. She didn't feel that Leerin was wrong, but she understood Layfon at the same time.

Layfon refused to use the Katana so he wouldn't taint his adopted father's skills. He hadn't once abandoned that decision

since he was exiled from Grendan. But Leerin came here because his adopted father had forgiven him, and that feeling shouldn't be ignored.

Layfon was unbelievable. He grew up under terrible circumstances, yet he possessed a strength that Nina didn't have. And he fought with reasons that she didn't agree with. The pain he endured didn't come from the fights with filth monsters or the pressure of becoming a Heaven's Blade Successor. That pain came from his feeling of betraying the orphanage. What did he feel when he was exposed to face everyone's reproach? Was he disappointed that they didn't understand him? Or was he angry? And what did Leerin think?

"What're you doing?"

Leerin had already prepared everything. Her speed in cooking even surprised Selina.

"Ah, no..... Well....."

"Still thinking of that?" she said with a stiff expression. She was forcing herself to smile.

"Um."

"What should I do with him? That moron....."

Anger and frustration pierced Leerin's words.

"I think he has his reasons."

"I know that."

Nina helped her lay out the eating utensils. Leu was in her own room, studying or reading books. She always forgot her meals. Selina had written on the board that she'd return late, so they prepared three sets of utensils tonight. Nina placed the large bowl of salad in the middle of the table and went to bring out another dish. Leerin reheated the bread she made in the morning, put it in a basket and took the basket to the table.

"But Layfon....."

"Leerin?"

Leerin swayed and fell to the side. Nina let go of the wok to support her. The wok fell onto the floor and the basket of bread rolled off the table.

"Leerin?"

It felt like she had lost all her strength. Blood had drained from her face, so white a face that it looked as if she was about to die. She panted.

"Leerin?" Nina shouted.

Leaving the kitchen to Leu, Nina took Leerin to the hospital. Looking at the other girl, sleeping with a drip in her arm, a feeling rushed through her, propelling Nina to run out of the hospital.

Layfon needed a stronger power.

She had been thinking of something since leaving Leerin in Myath. Savaris was here. Grendan had sent over a Heaven's Blade to take over the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang. It would be the best for Nina, Karian and anyone else if the Haikizoku could be retrieved without hurting anyone. No, it was all right even if she was to sacrifice herself. However, Savaris seemed to have another purpose here. He wanted to fight Layfon. Why? Because Layfon was an obstacle? Or because..... Layfon needed to become stronger.

Nina had been worrying since Leerin arrived. Would it be today , or tomorrow..... That thought had stayed in her mind for three months. Time had calmed her heart, but uneasiness still remained.

A Military Artist who had enough strength to match Layfon's had come from Grendan. Nina didn't have the confidence he could win. He needed to become stronger, but she didn't know how to help him. How could she help him get stronger when he was stronger than her? He didn't start from zero. He had already reached 100. The present Nina was like someone at 10 thinking of how to reach 100. She should probably tell him about the event.

But how should she reply if he asked why she didn't tell him earlier? By telling him she was reminded in a dream not to say it? Telling him what she encountered in Myath? She felt it was unfair that she got caught in this event. She wanted to share it with someone and talk over it with him or her, but if she did that, then that other person would become involved.

She couldn't do that.

How could she obtain his forgiveness when that time came? She chose not to tell him because she didn't know how it would turn out between them, especially with Layfon. How could she get him involved when he didn't want to fight? But.....

Nina pressed the button. The lift took her to the floor where Zuellni's Mechanical Department was. She didn't have work today. The people working here greeted her, and she returned the greeting as she searched for Layfon. Since the city had moved into the tropics, the Mechanical Department was hot. Just walking in it was enough to make her sweat.

Right, he was here working close to the central location. Right now, he was standing, holding a mop and forgetting himself.

"Layfon."

"Eh?" he looked at the direction of the voice. "Captain? What is it?"

"Leerin's fainted."

".... Eh?" he said, confused.

"She must have fainted from the exhaustion from the long journey and her inability to adapt to the new environment. She's in the hospital."

"Right," his body shook, his face green, but he didn't head straight for the hospital.

"Not going?"

"I....."

"Why can't you accept it?" she felt him hesitating because of the box.

"You heard it too. I betrayed my father. How can I accept it?"

"Is that really it?"

"Yes."

"Not because you're still angry? Till now....."

"How could I. There's no such thing!"

The handle of the mop broke in his hand. His shrill voice echoed in the Mechanical Department and gradually faded. His hands still shook.

"You're saying this because you don't know! Father did so much for us....."

"Then why are you ignoring his feelings?"

Emotions shouldn't govern his actions. Particularly not in this situation. Leerin probably knew that too. But she said those words back then because she felt strongly about them. She had been holding those feelings throughout the journey to Zuellni.

"Your adopted father has realized his mistake. But why can't you accept him? Aren't you ignoring his feelings?"

"That..... Of course I know that," he looked at the ground.

Nina reached out her hand. "I want you to become strong."

"Captain."

"I don't know what you'll choose, but if you're not returning to Grendan and want to stay a Military Artist for a while longer, I want you to become strong. Leerin's right, this isn't Grendan. I can't support you from behind. At present, I can't catch up to you."

"....." He seemed to want to say something.

Nina saw defeat in his eyes. Why did he lose?

(What?)

She felt shocked after looking at his eyes.

(What.....)

Why did he look like he'd been abandoned?

"Layfon..... I....."

"Captain, you....." Instead of saying more, he sped past her.

"Wait!?"

But he didn't stop, and she didn't chase after him. The broken handle of the mop was left behind on the floor.

"Wu!"

Gorneo kneeled down at the heavy impact of the fist. The time was deep into the night. No one was using the Training Complex. Light spilled out from the training ground of the 5th platoon.

"Too naive. I thought training outside could improve your naivety. Is this all you can do!"

Gorneo curled into a ball, as if to vomit the pain in his stomach, but no mercy came from that voice.

"I'm not yet....." he said, a spasm working into his throat.

"Yes, yes. Show me your endurance."

He pushed himself up to face his own brother – Savaris Qaulafin Luckens. Why was his brother here?

Gorneo was confused when Savaris suddenly appeared in his room. Grendan's Heaven's Blade Successors shouldn't have left the

city. But Savaris was here to capture the Haikizoku. How foolish. It was only a rumor that a Haikizoku could realize a Military Artist's dream. Such an elite Military Artist actually left Grendan for a rumor..... But Savaris then explained it to him.

"This is the Queen's order."

In that case, he could only believe what Savaris said, believe in the Queen's words. He believed and accepted it even though he was doubtful. And that was what a Queen's existence was like. Consequently, understanding filtered through him now that he believed – about the report of the 17th platoon in the ruined city, the 10th platoon being suddenly disbanded, the doubts over the platoon matches, the appearance of the Mercenary Gang, Zuellni's loss of control. Had these all to do with the Haikizoku? If so, then the Haikizoku was poison to the city, particularly if it was related to Zuellni's rampage.

Could it be.....

Grendan continued to drift through danger zones. Was it because it had a Haikizoku? Why did the Queen want it? But.....

It had been three months since the last meeting with his brother.

"Come. How long do you plan to keep swaying?"

What had his brother been doing in three months?

He stood up, panting as he watched Savaris. That smile was the same as the smile back from Grendan, but he could see it had

turned older. Gorneo had been in Zuellni for five years now. It wasn't strange for his brother to have grown older. Savaris probably thought the same.

No, it was easier to say Savaris had forgotten the brother he had five years ago. However, in these three months, Gorneo's brother would train him from time to time. He would come once every 2-3 days or he wouldn't show up for a whole week. He never told him what he did in these three months. Savaris was probably sleeping in the roaming bus of the Mercenary Gang. Layfon and Haia had a duel in the last Military Arts Competition, as if someone had planned for them to fight. Was that to do with Savaris too? So he wanted to fight Layfon?

"Please keep at it. I plan to make you a teacher if you return."

"What!?" Gorneo said, speechless.

"I think you should be able to inherit father's name since you've had five years of experience."

"Hang on. Being a teacher..... There should be people stronger than me. Like Parsen and Denet. And if it's to inherit the Luckens... ...."

"Those two are teachers already, and half of the teachers you knew are already dead."

"How....."

Savaris told him their death in a frank and refreshing manner. Just like the time when he told him of Gahard's death without considering his feelings.

"Geez, death is one split-second moment no matter how long we train. We live in a world of a moment."

"Brother."

"Well, in a sense, that's happiness too."

A shiver ran down Gorneo's spine as he watched his brother. Savaris..... his brother..... this creature..... he had always seen the world in a different light. As if he had returned to the Savaris in Grendan. Everyone looked at the Heaven's Blade Successor, Savaris, with respect. But not Gorneo, who watched him with fear. Every time he looked at his brother, he felt that he was watching a monster, and uneasiness and fear filled him.

"Brother!" he said in a loud voice to cover up the trembling in himself. "It's natural that you would inherit the Luckens Military Arts."

"That can't be done. I'm not interested in females."

"What!?"

"Aaa, that doesn't mean I'm interested in males. I just don't have much of an interest in sex. I haven't done a checkup, but I probably can't produce the next generation. How can someone who can't produce the next generation take over the Luckens' name?"

What should he say to an older brother like that?

"So I can only fight. I can only feel good in fights. Aa, so boring! Why is Layfon so lazy? I was so looking forward to it and thought the Haikizoku would get out of control. I thought I could see the power that I once saw in Grendan," he watched the sky.

"So boring! So peaceful! Damn! Isn't there a place that is more exciting than Grendan? Was that why Lintence came to Grendan?"

Gorneo didn't understand why he was angry. Savaris wanted to fight something powerful, and it did not matter whether it was a human or a filth monster. He remained the same as when he was in Grendan. Other Military Artists would think this was a Heaven's Blade Successor's wish to improve and become stronger, and that was why he was special in their eyes. But it was hard for Gorneo to live with him as part of the family. Though he knew a

Military Artist should become strong, this level of a wish was too much. So he feared his brother.

Savaris's gaze fell. He must have tidied his emotions now. "So for that purpose, you must at least learn the 72 techniques. We'll leave the others for later. As for the secrets of them... well, try your hardest to feel them with your body."

Gorneo readied his fighting stance after regulating his breathing .

"You'll take that girl with you when you return to Grendan, right?"

"Eh?"

Shante's shadow surfaced as he was releasing his Kei.

"An opening!"

Savaris' fist landed on his brother's nose.

The helmet fell and shattered as it touched the ground. Shocked by the sound of fury in the air, the medical team of Grendan stood numb, their mission forgotten.

Strong gusts of Kei whipped her long hair around her. Unbelievable cracks spidered across the concrete floor beneath her feet, proof of the Kei released from Cauntia. Blood flowed from her mouth.

Wearing the heavy armor, Reverse heard her tooth break. She must have gritted her teeth too hard.

"I actually....." she moaned, and spit out the broken tooth.

Her coat was heavily damaged. The first high speed attack had split its seams. The second and the third attacks tore the coat further apart. The thin protective coat made to protect against pollutants while allowing maximum movement had its strength drastically reduced. This was of course, to be expected. On the contrary, a normal coat would restrict freedom of movement.

Cauntia's Kei wasn't used to defend.

Her fight had a limit of ten attacks. Her coat would be completely destroyed once she went over that limit. Right now, parts of her body were exposed. Pollutants burnt her skin. The medical team was here to treat her, but they couldn't approach due to the Kei surrounding her.

"Cauntia..... Cauntia, it's enough. It's already finished."

Reverse strode straight up to her despite her Kei crashing against his hard armor.

"Finished?" she looked at him with widened eyes. Fury filled her blood-shot eyes. "What's finished? The battle? Or the meaning of my existence?"

"Cauntia."

"Or is that I, for failing the battle, no longer have the right to be a Heaven's Blade Successor?"

"Cauntia!" he held her hand.

"We already won."

"We didn't. We didn't hunt it down!"

Her hand shook. Was it from anger or reproach? Her tendency to attack affected not only others, but herself too.

"We didn't take it down but it won't come near Grendan anymore. That means we're done, because we've guarded Grendan ."

"This.....!!" she swallowed her anger. His genuine eyes had taken away her fury.

"Wu, wu, wu.....!!" she moaned. Kei stopped flooding out. The medical team rushed to her and began treatment.

"Thanks," someone said to Reverse as he watched the medical team take Cauntia to the hospital.

This someone was as tall as Cauntia.

Reverse lifted his head. "Troyatte, is something the matter?"

"The old woman said that guy's already escaped. It wouldn't be good for that to become a lie."

Reverse sighed in relief. He made up what he said to Cauntia back then. There wasn't any evidence to back up his statement.

"I was to come here as insurance, but it doesn't look like I can catch up to it. Barmelin should probably have a way to do that. She was making quite a fuss before this too."

The elimination of the intruders in the Inner Court had left her some bad memories, and she had shut herself in her home since then.

"Lintence holds no interest in an enemy that has fled. But he's given that guy a name."

Given a name to the filth monster that had fled Grendan.

"Yes, the enemy is strong," Reverse nodded, remembering how the humongous monster had sustained zero injuries. He had taken the filth monster's attack with its sharp teeth to protect Cauntia.

"That doesn't sound convincing, coming from you."

"That... That can't be."

"Well, you're Grendan's most prided knight."

A commotion in the direction where Cauntia had disappeared to.

"Look, the princess is calling for her knight."

"Ah, yes, well then....." he made a bow to Troyatte and stumbled away in a run.

The handsome man squinted at Reverse. "Ah~~ I also want a lover. I'm already tired of what's limited to a bed."

He cocked his head. "No, that can't be my fault, right?"

He left the scene, thinking his conclusion was quite foolish.

Chapter 3: Wish

His mood had gone to the bottom of what could be called the " worst" in the past few months. Nothing much had happened since the Military Arts Competition with Myath, but now... Even Layfon was at a loss.

(Aa, what should I do? I just ran off.)

The anger in him when he had argued with Nina had now faded. Right now, he felt guilty for leaving work and throwing a tantrum at Nina. He walked on the empty road in low spirits.

Though he wanted to go back, he felt that the Captain would chase him all the way to the dormitory. No, perhaps she wouldn't come.....

He strode around his dormitory, saw something shining and went over like a moth attracted to light. It was an area designed for vending machines. It had everything, from drinks and snacks to fast food and cleaning liquid. No wind blew here, as a roof had been constructed over the area. People who stayed late would sometimes sleep here for a night. Tonight, no one was about. Layfon sat down on a long bench.

"Ha....." he sighed. He wished he could release all the feelings stuffed inside him.

To hold the Katana again meant he had to inherit Psyharden. His adopted father had forgiven him, and that should make him happier than anything else.

He shouldn't be unhappy at this.

He recalled snatches of memories from when he was small. His adopted father was dancing with a weapon in the dojo. In silence, he swung the wooden Katana, his upper body naked. Metal was embedded in the wooden Katana to give it a heavier feel similar to a real Dite. The air vibrated every time he swung the Katana. At the time, the Katana had accidentally hit little Layfon, and he sat down, seemingly paralyzed, but he didn't cry out.

Layfon watched the air flow enveloping his adopted father's muscles as he swung the Katana. He was also watching the other thing rushing out of Derek.

Back then, he didn't know that was Kei.

Having finished practicing, his adopted father smiled at him. No one else was in the dojo. At that time, the dojo was extremely empty. It was simple to count the number of people who came in to train. Most people had joined the other dojos. Derek had already retired.

"Do you want to hold it?"

He had said that to Layfon.

"You're the only Military Artist left in the orphanage. You'll one day hold a Dite and fight for the people of Grendan."

Layfon took the Katana with both hands. The handle, glistening with sweat, was heavy. Unable to take that weight, he again sat down on the floor. All he could do was fall. Tears fought to fall from his eyes.

His adopted father smiled and held him up in his arm. "No need to rush. I'll protect you all till you've grown. And after that, it's your turn."

He had decided from that moment on to hold the Katana. He wanted to become a hero like his adopted father.

He should be happy. His adopted father willed for him to hold the Katana that he thought he could never touch again. This, however, didn't mean what happened in the past was cancelled. He had tainted the name of a Heaven's Blade. He had betrayed the people of Grendan..... Those things meant nothing for Layfon except for the fact that he had tainted the name of Psyharden. He had insulted the father who had sworn to protect them.

When he took up the sword, he wanted to let those who wished to study under Psyharden's name to know that he had cut his ties with Psyharden. His actions had gained Derek many students, but later on, the dojo went back to its desolate state. That didn't concern Layfon much as he was plagued by guilt.

Most of the students came to learn the Psyharden techniques because Layfon was a Heaven's Blade successor. However, that thinking alone was not enough to grasp hold of the essence of Psyharden. Back then, Layfon knew a Military Artist in the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang also used Psyharden, and that the Gang's reputation had far exceeded that of Grendan's. What he didn't know was that the leader of the Gang was the apprentice of Derek's brother from the same Military Arts school.

Many people came to learn the Psyharden techniques, but many of them had stopped coming.

"They're just techniques taught to mercenaries," one of the students said and left the dojo.

That didn't sit well with Layfon.

What happened to that person afterwards?

He remembered seeing him once in a public battle. That was it. If that person was still alive, he must still be fighting in Grendan. If that was the case, he might now realize that he had misunderstood the essence of Psyharden.

Some people speculated that Layfon had abandoned Psyharden techniques because he was dissatisfied with them. He was angry, but he chose to ignore the speculation. War. War meant survival. It did not have room for contempt and nostalgia. One couldn't fight if one died. And if one died, one could protect nothing. The dead could only return to the earth. What was wrong with that saying? Everyone thought the same way in war.

"I know what you want to say....." Layfon burst out.

Yet he wanted to deny it. If he could accept a rational truth, he should have kept calm at the start. But he acted foolishly under the urgency of the situation. As such, he tried his best to keep calm during his fights. That was so he could keep on living. He couldn't lose that feeling.

He sometimes thought of the teachings of Psyharden even though he didn't hold the Katana.

Hearing footsteps, Layfon lifted his head, took out his cash card in a fluster and hurried to stand before a vending machine. He didn't want anyone to see him feeling down in the middle of the night, sitting with his head down on a bench.

While he was deciding on which juice to pick...

"..... What're you doing?"

"Eh?"

Though it was deep into the night, Felli was still in uniform.

"Felli too. Why are you here?"

"I was reading in a certain place and forgot the time. I came over since I am hungry."

"I see, but....."

"I don't go out in my pajamas," she concluded and went to buy some juice and a snack.

Layfon thought she would return home after that, but she sat down on a chair before a table, and opened the packet she bought.

"Felli?"

"Feel free. I have something to talk to you about."

"Uh, ok," he nodded and pressed a button. He only realized he had chosen a hot drink when he took the can.

"Fon Fon, will you not accept it no matter what?"

"..... So it's still about that," he said. He didn't want to discuss it .

"Is it the captain? Well, it's not like I don't understand your feelings."

"Ha."

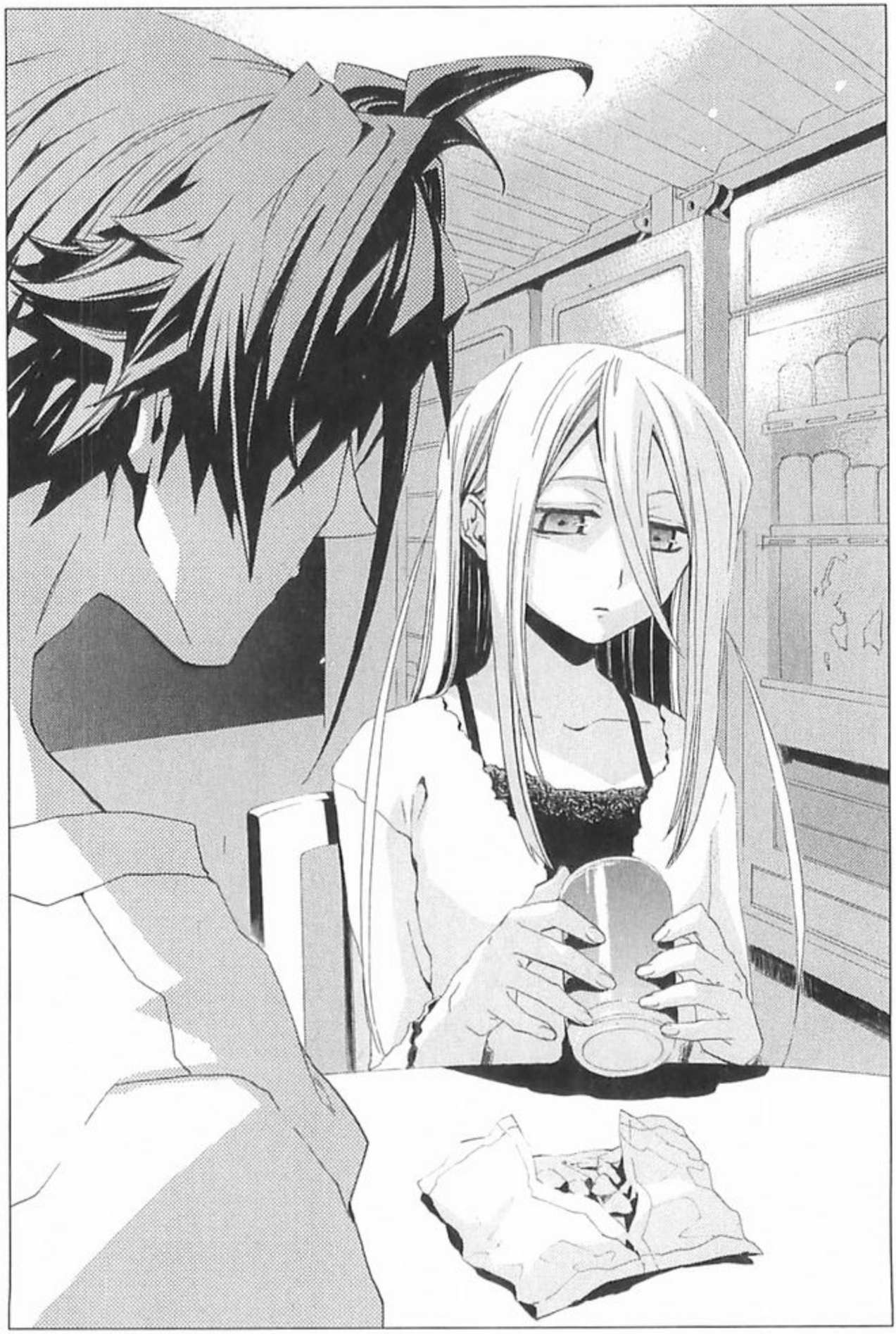
"But that's just natural. You've been forgiven, but you still choose to refuse it. That's hard to accept. Besides, Leerin let us hear the conversation. I think she wants us to make a decision too."

"....."

"I think you should accept it."

"Why?"

"Because you have to fight," she touched the surface of the can. " You don't have to take it if you give up on Military Arts. Because that would only cause you nostalgia."



Nostalgia. That word caused him pain. He wanted to deny it, but he hardly resisted it when he held the Dite. Although he did resist when the Student President blackmailed him into fighting, now he didn't really dislike what had happened. That was because he enjoyed the time he had spent with Nina and the 17th platoon.

He didn't hate Karian now. While Nina had gone missing and Zuellni was on a rampage, the Student President had chosen to negotiate with the filth monster even though he had no fighting strength. He fought in a way that differed from Nina's. And Layfon respected him.

"But after, if you choose to continue to fight filth monsters, you should take up the Katana."

"I don't want to hold it....."

"If you don't hold a Heaven's Blade, what you now have is just an ordinary Dite. Don't you find that imperfect?"

"Uh....."

He couldn't deny what she said. No Dites except the Heaven's Blades could sustain the Kei released by him. He hadn't mentioned this to anyone else. He didn't find that painful at first, since he only had to bear with it until he had the Heaven's Blade. Just who had noticed it?

"Did the Captain say something?"

"Why so sudden?"

"You look like you've been wronged. The Captain's opinion is probably the same as mine. I want to know what she said to make you look like this. She probably didn't mean to, but I guess I'll have to guide you."

"Wronged...." He couldn't deny her.

Wronged..... No. He was angry with what she said. What was it ? Oh yes.

"I can't support you."

That line. But she said before that she wanted to become strong with him.

"Isn't that natural."

"Eh?"

He felt like Felli had sneaked in a laugh behind his back.

"You said that even though you know how powerful you are."

"Uh, no, I mean....."

"I think you should apologize to the Captain."

"Why?"

"I heard that you were the one who took down the enemy's flag in the intercity match with Myath."

"Ah, yes."

Felli had been kidnapped during that time, so Layfon had gone alone to fight Haia. Nina and the others had the job of taking the enemy's flag. In the end, Zuellni won the match.

"Haia wasn't an easy opponent since he's the leader of a famous Mercenary Gang. No one in Zuellni could win against him besides you. And while fighting him, you helped the Captain."

Layfon could tell what she wanted to say.

"..... Of course, that was all because I got kidnapped. Sorry."

"That wasn't your fault....."

In fact, it was his fault. Haia wanted to fight him because they both inherited the Psyharden skills. Felli just got caught up in this fight between brothers from the same Military Arts school.

Karian had arranged for Layfon to enter Military Arts to guarantee their victory in the Military Arts Competition. He had also hired the Mercenary Gang to boost the students' strength.

Layfon couldn't underestimate Haia's strength. That proof was shown in the injury on his left hand.

"That wound on your left hand is a problem."

"Well....."

"Would you be calm if I or the Captain got hurt?"

"Wu....."

"You're strong. So strong that you could spare time to help the Captain while fighting Haia. We can't support you. I don't really know what the Captain thinks since I'm a Psychokinesist, but as someone fighting on the frontlines, she probably understands that more than me. When you truly need help, she might not be able to provide the support you need. And she blames herself for it. That's why she wants to do something for you, and she also hopes you can do something. Do you understand that feeling?"

"..... Even if I take up the Katana, that can't solve the problem of the Dite."

"Even so, you can do something if you take up the Katana."

That was it.

"Whether it's just one out of 100%, or one out of a million chances. As long as it increases the chances of your survival, I hope you can take up the Katana."

"That probability means nothing. When you die, you can't escape it. I've seen that many times," he protested.

Felli stood up and raised her right hand. He avoided the attack..... But he swallowed at the expression on her face. Face red with eyes widened..... No matter how he looked at her, he knew she was angry.

And next, the sound of something hitting his cheek.

"You don't know that," she said emotionally. Even she herself didn't know why she was feeling this way. "You don't understand what it feels like when you can't do anything!" She ran off.

"..... I knew it would turn out like this," he sighed.

Only defeat awaited him if he went to battle without any preparation. All he did was flee to this city. But what should he do when he had nowhere to escape to?

When she came to, it was already night. She knew immediately she was in the hospital, but all she could think of was why she was wasting time here.

"Right. I fainted," Leerin sighed.

This was her first time being admitted to a hospital. She had visited others in the hospital a couple of times though. That time when she visited Layfon here in Zuellni, and back at Grendan when her adopted father was attacked by filth monsters and had to stay in the hospital.

She watched the ceiling, never thinking she would have to stay in a hospital as well.

Her first time taking a long journey. Her first time coming to another city. She did her best to keep going no matter how many first times she encountered. Perhaps all the stress she had been bearing had burst out at once. The drip attached to her arm prevented her from moving.

"I thought I was quite healthy too," she said, looking out the window at the nighttime scenery of Zuellni.

Three months. Though she was used to Zuellni's streetscape, she felt today's scenery was different from usual. Was this because of the change in the color of the sky? Compared to Grendan, the building style here was different. But the color of the sky shouldn't deviate much. Was it because of the stars?

Leaving alone the theory that had no basis, her thoughts turned to the people living here. No Synola. None of Leerin's other good friends. No classmates from Grendan's school. No orphanage and no adopted father. In here, she only had Layfon, the Layfon who had disappeared from Grendan.

"..... What should I do?"

Someone knocked on the door.

Leerin glanced at the clock hanging on the wall. It was midnight . Who was it? Someone from the hospital? She gave an answer and the door slid open quietly.

"Layfon....."

The light in the corridor lit up his figure.

"Sorry, did I wake you?"

"No," she shook her head in a fluster as he came to stand by her bedside.

"Are you feeling ok?"

"Yeah, it's all right now. I'm just a bit tired."

"The Captain said you fainted due to exhaustion."

"I see."

The emergency lighting in the room wasn't enough to clearly illuminate his face.

What should she do? They had never had such a huge argument. In the past, Layfon was always the first to complain, Leerin then got angry, and he then apologized. She'd then forgive him. But what about this time? Though she thought he was in the wrong, should she still act angry? She was sad when he refused the Dite. The thing she had taken with her all the way to Zuellni had become worthless. Perhaps Layfon had forgotten all that had happened in Grendan. Of course, that wasn't wrong in his perspective. Since he couldn't return to Grendan, he could only cut ties with it. Hence, the Dite she brought with her might have interfered with his decision.

"Layfon, am I a bother?"

"Not at all," he lightly shook his head. "I'm happy. I'm really happy. I never thought father would forgive me. Nothing makes me happier than that."

"Then....."

"But it troubles me to suddenly take up what I've resolved to give up..... I need time to tidy my feelings."

"I see....."

They fell silent. Was this the only reason? Did he want to forget everything that had happened in Grendan? She wanted to ask. She wanted to know. And her journey might truly come to an end when she heard his reason. Should she ask or not ask? In the end, she decided to ask the question, but what she managed to confirm was something else.

"How many times have you been to the hospital since coming to Zuellni?"

"Eh?'

"I heard from Nina that you've been admitted to the hospital several times."

The time when the larvae attacked the school. The time when he investigated in the ruined city. The time when the ground of Zuellni collapsed. The time when he fought Haia. Four times altogether.

"..... Um."

"But you stayed in the hospital only once in Grendan. You sustained many injuries but you never had to be admitted."

That one time of the hospital visit was after he had become a Heaven's Blade successor, caused by some training that he did.

"Yeah."

"Do you know why you get wounded so many times in here?"

After looking at the confusion and chaos governing the people in Myath at the news of the filth monsters attack, Leerin understood how unusual Grendan was. The incident had also made her realize how safe Grendan was. It was lucky for them to have strong Military Artists, and they also had the elites – the 12 Heaven's Blade successors. No city could be luckier than Grendan. At the same time, this was lucky for the Heaven's Blade successors as they could reduce each others' burden. They didn't have to consider being forced into a corner. Even if they made a mistake, Military Artists as strong as them could fill in any gaps left by an error. This meant one didn't have to push oneself too much in a fight. Of course, there were other reasons. For example, Layfon didn't have a Heaven's Blade and had to use a normal Dite that failed to maximize his potential. Things like that.

"Yeah," he nodded.

Though she didn't know whether he truly knew, she didn't feel impatient. That was because he had come to visit her.

"Yes, I wouldn't have to force myself if I was in Grendan. I only needed to fight enemies who were on par with my strength. As you said, I wouldn't use any other Dites," he said, stammering in his speech. "There were Sensei and Savaris-san. No other situation could be better than that. That might be the most fortunate place for a Military Artist. Because of that, I know I should accept the Katana and choose the road to enable me to become stronger."

"In that case....."

"I know. I'm really happy. In the end, I'm still a Psyharden Military Artist. Nothing can make me happier than father's forgiveness. Looking at Haia holding the Katana so naturally, to tell the truth, I was jealous of him."

Leerin had heard that Haia was the leader of the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang.

"..... Can I, can I really have that Katana?" he said with a trembling voice.

She now understood why he didn't immediately take the Katana – He was afraid. Tears filled her eyes. He was afraid, speculating and doubting whether the forgiveness was not a lie. He even thought that perhaps the thing inside the box wasn't a Dite.

She once again recalled the past he might have wanted to forget. But from the current Layfon, it was clear that he wouldn't have forgotten it. At that time, the people in the orphanage refused him. They called him a traitor, a contemptuous person. Father didn't

say anything to comfort him. That couldn't be helped, since he was also in shock.

"Father said that he's been in battles for too long. Because he spent a long time teaching students in the dojo, something had restricted him without his knowing. The techniques of Psyharden. The techniques that he learned in order to survive, he's forgotten them."

"Father....."

His shoulders shook under the dim light. She didn't know when , but her voice trembled.

"Father knows your path will only get more difficult. He didn't give this to you to inherit Psyharden. He thinks he has nothing left to teach you. He wishes you to grow freely and not be bound by anything."

She remembered that time back in the past. Layfon was too small to accept father's training. From a distance, she watched him swing the wooden Katana on his own. She watched him sway and stagger, unable to take its weight. Even so, he imitated father's stance.

"Does that make you happy?" she had asked.

Back then, she didn't know the difference between normal people and Military Artists. She thought effort alone could make one become a Military Artist. Sometimes, the boys at the orphanage would play with drawing paper and tree branches,

using them as swords in their play. Sometimes, they used those things to tease the girls, so Leerin had hated Military Artists. She didn't understand Layfon's dream to become one.

Layfon wanted to become a Military Artist. Well, he was a boy after all. He was always spacing out and he didn't mix with the other kids. And Leerin was disappointed that he was, after all, just like the other boys. She had wanted to invite him to play dolls with her.....

"Yeah," he had smiled at her in response as he fell on the ground under the weight of the wooden Katana. Somehow, she felt that smile to be different from the usual Layfon's look. It seemed to sparkle.

..... After that, she understood the difference between Military Artists and normal people, and she knew Layfon was a Military Artist.

Father had prepared him a wooden Katana once he started training with him. She watched him damage the Katana again and again. She watched him swing it again and again. She watched him become a Heaven's Blade successor. And..... and she watched him leave Grendan to come to Zuellni.

"I'm happy. I'm really happy."

"Yeah....."

Even without looking at each other, they knew they were both crying. She felt his tears from her ears, and her tears fell on his

neck. They no longer knew who did the hugging first. Tears stole away their strength, and they held each other to give themselves support.

This was great. Layfon didn't plan to toss away his past in Grendan. She had thought he had sealed her away in his memories , but the truth revealed otherwise. She was really happy.

"Don't forget us."

"How could I."

When they confirmed their faces were wet with tears, their lips overlapped naturally.

At this time, Alsheyra had gone to visit the usual bar as Synola.

"Uh~?" she watched the ceiling, feeling a bit drunk. Though the lighting was dim, the structure on the ceiling stood out vividly. Submerged a long time in smoke and oil, the color of the ceiling had changed.

"What is it?" the owner of the bar asked. He was originally her classmate. It was usual for Synola to act strange, so he only asked out of curiosity.

"Um~" she responded.

The owner turned away. "You look bored. Is it because that kid's not here?"

"Yeah, if I had known, I wouldn't have let her go so far away. Ahah, my stress is piling up~~"

"You're strange. Anyone who wants to get close to you would probably get scared away. Though you're a beauty. What a waste."

"What, you want to date me?"

"Be at ease. I've already given up."

"Tsk~"

She put her cheek on the bar. Smiling at her bitterly, he poured wine into a glass and went to deliver it to a client.

She made another "Um~" noise. "So strange, Grendan's route hasn't changed."

She meant the destination of the city. At that time, Grendan was moving in the direction of the filth monster that Cauntia and Reverse had defeated. The filth monster didn't really flee. It was forced to leave. According to old tradition, they would give it a name, but that hadn't been done yet. Hence, that problem was pushed aside. At present, Grendan should have returned to its usual route in an attempt to quickly decide the outcome of the battle. People called Grendan the insane city. It even ignored the basic rule of moving to the locations of selenium mines.

"Is that escaped filth monster a big someone? I don't think so."

Though it was chased away, it did impress upon her a true sense of "strength" that she couldn't feel from other filth monsters.

"..... Speaking of which, how does this relate to the intruders?" Bothered by this point, she left the bar.

Barmelin would probably be outraged if she found out that there was another way into the Inner Court. However, only the royalty knew of that route, so the other Heaven's Blades could only bear the nasty smell through the usual route. If only the intruder had died in the maze.

Synola came to the door that would open into the Inner Court.

It had been one week since the intruder got here. The city's auto-repair ability had wiped clean the traces left by the previous fight. Synola stood at the door, looking a bit drunk. No handles were built into the door. A shallow trench split the middle of the door, yet seams filled that trench. Protruding holes and depressions covered the door like a puzzle. Even Synola couldn't open this door. Behind this door laid Grendan's real consciousness. When would this consciousness wake? What did the intruder come here for? Should she not have asked Barmelin to come?

But she couldn't fight him if that intruder was related to the Wolf Faces. Since she would be pulled to another side, someone needed to fight that person. Besides, it was a high possibility that the Wolf Faces knew of the Inner Court.

"Ah, so restricted."

Her complaint disappeared without an echo.

"I want to see some change here, but things stay the same."

The combination of the environment and a good match had given birth to the monster called Alsheyra Almonise. Her strength far exceeded any Heaven's Blade successor. Though her strength couldn't be compared to the combined strength of all 12 Heaven's Blade successors, she far exceeded the strength of individual Heaven's Blades. But no one could lead her to that thing as long as the consciousness of Grendan remained in its slumber. Just what was she to do?

"Should I give up?" she asked. Of course, no one replied her. She felt uncomfortable at the silence.

"Well, shouldn't I ask Grendan about the route?" she turned, her back facing the door as her train of thought turned to the Haikizoku.

She hadn't seen it for a long time even though she was the Queen. The encounter of that time was because Leerin was in danger, and Grendan responded to it. She knew when she first met Leerin. Tears had slid down Leerin's face in her first encounter with Synola. She knew, after looking at the figure in the depth of Leerin's pupils..... Along with the cruelty of fate, that moment had given Synola, Alsheyra Almonise, the sign that the person she was waiting for had appeared. The time was here. It was time for Grendan to fulfill its mission.

Yes, she knew. She herself and the 12 Heaven's Blades were not enough. The royal family of Grendan lacked a true successor. But..... Why did Grendan appear in front of Leerin?

It wasn't rare for the blood that made up the three families of the royal line to slip into the ordinary populace. Though Grendan had a long history, it didn't have the power to enable all three royal families to live a rich life. It was rare for that strength to appear in the populace of Grendan, but it wasn't extremely unusual. But why.....? Synola asked again, gritting her teeth.

"If possible, I want that child to be happy."

Military Artists were born to keep the world in balance. As a normal person, why did Leerin have to face that? That was why Synola let her leave the city. If it could be done, she wanted her to stay away and live happily with Layfon. If she had stayed in Grendan, she would get caught in something bad.

In order to head for the Mechanical Department through the secret passage in the Inner Court, Synola must first head back to the palace. Though she found that troublesome, she preferred this road over the nasty smelling maze. Because she could use this privilege, she couldn't help but think of Barmelin's expression of hate. Barmelin always talked to others like she was an elder.

Synola hummed.

She entered the palace and halted her steps.

"Your Majesty," Kanaris said, waiting in the private room for the King. As a shadow Military Artist, she had been using this palace. She looked like the Queen, as if she were Synola's shadow.

"Where have you gone to? I asked Delbone-sama, but she wouldn't tell me a thing. I've been looking for you."

"That's one of the seven secrets of the Queen."

"That's just....." Kanaris sighed.

This wasn't fun at all. Synola wouldn't have minded if she kept asking "what are the other six secrets?" or something like that.

"So what is it? It's late."

"I have something to report."

"What is it?" she looked at the document in her hand.

A gene report. But the name of the person who wrote this report wasn't on the document. On the other hand, someone else's name was on it.

"What do you mean?" Synola..... Alsheyra asked.

"..... I did this while Your Majesty was outside posing as Synola. I'm sorry. I wasn't interested in it at the beginning, but my thinking changed after so many things have happened."

"Uh....."

"Why did Grendan appear before that girl? Because of the filth monster? But Your Majesty has already controlled the Haikizoku. Your Majesty wouldn't have ignored it, besides, you were already there. You could have arrived there before Grendan showed up without the girl noticing. But Grendan appeared before her as if to become her shield."

Alsheyra's gaze kept glued to the name on the report.

"My doubt began there. I took a strand of hair from that girl and did an investigation..... And the result is what you're seeing now ."

It was easy for Kanaris to take a strand of hair of a normal person. And then she knew about her.

"Your Majesty, you know.....!"

It was enough.

"Kanaris. I knew. This isn't because you've overstepped."

She grabbed hold of Kanaris's neck and lifted her up. Her eyes rolled to show white.

"But you're too loyal to your duty. This isn't loyalty to me. If I weren't the Queen, you'd probably carry out your duty under the next King."

"Ah..... Wu.....! Wu!"

She coldly watched her struggling legs.

Should she kill her off here? This woman knew. It wasn't strange for Alsheyra to know since she was from the royal line.

"But you're now my subordinate. You must finish your mission under my orders. Don't you think you shouldn't do what I don't wish to be done? Though you're good at preparations, can't you give my feelings some consideration?"

"....."

The legs gradually stopped struggling. No more strength to even make a noise. Alsheyra released her hold.

"You're wrong if you think I can't kill you..... I won't allow this to happen again."

"I'm..... very sorry."

Alsheyra destroyed the report and returned to her private room . The Kei in her hand had turned the document into powder in an instant. The maids coming in tomorrow would clean that up. The Queen cocked her head at the powder.

She recalled the name on the document.

Herder Eutnohl, the eldest son of Eutnohl, one of the three royal families. He was her fiancé. If she had married him, they would have given birth to a child who would have borne Leerin's fate. But he had eloped with a normal girl. He was a fool under a curse.

"Why did you stay in Grendan. You idiot....."

According to the calculations based on the year when he went missing, Leerin's age matched the results perfectly. She understood that. She had already considered this possibility.

She just didn't want to confirm it.

Chapter 4: Confusion

In the morning, after discovering a city was nearing them, the siren sounded in the sky of Zuellni. Someone quickly confirmed from the flag that it was the Academy City Falnir.

"Again....."

Karian was having morning tea. Enjoying the time with a cup of tea was one of his hobbies. Though the siren had interfered with his pastime, it did little to affect his mood.

After announcing the situation, he ordered all Military Artists to gather and that the normal students were to evacuate to the shelters. It was after hearing the name of the other city that he started to feel annoyed. He clearly remembered the results of the past five Military Arts Competitions, along with the names of the cities. Whether it was Myath or Falnir...

"We haven't fought this city before."

That was strange.

It was common knowledge that Regios wouldn't move too far away from their selenium mines. As Zuellni only had one mine, the area it moved in should be small. Normal speculation would conclude that the other city had had contact with Zuellni. However, Zuellni had yet to fight Falnir. This meant the results of the previous Military Arts Competition had caused huge

fluctuations in the movement areas. The other possibility was that after the rampage, Zuellni had run across Myath, and was in turn now running across Falnir.

"Is that really the case?"

He wasn't convinced. The city had been moving for a long time twice now. This trip into the summer season took longer time than usual. One could explain that by an error, but no detailed proof was forthcoming. Then one could only conclude the only possible explanation was chance. But was this enough to solve the problem ? As the Student President of Zuellni, as the highest authority of this Academy City, how should he respond to this change?

"Anyway, just focus on solving the present problem."

He couldn't ignore the present because of his consideration of the future. Leaving his sister behind, he left the house.

Before the ringing of the siren, Nina was waiting for Layfon at the entrance of his dormitory. She was already awake when the siren sounded. What she was surprised with was that Layfon had apologized to Leerin, and later on, Leerin had asked her to take the Dite from her room and bring it to him.

Nina followed Leerin's instructions. Though it wasn't that good to enter another's room, Leerin had given her permission to do so. The light was dim, but she quickly found the box. She had seen it once, and the box jumped out to her as it stood on the desk.

Once she handed the Dite over to Layfon, he had unwrapped the box and taken out the Dite. A metal Dite with a thread weaving around the handle.

"This is....."

"Yes, this is proof of one having learned all Psyharden skills," he held the handle with nostalgia, walked into the court in the dormitory and restored the Dite.

The beauty of the Katana made her speechless. The length of the blade was as long as Layfon's arm. It was wide, giving off an aura of power. The morning sunlight reflecting off the blade made her squint.

"Amazing," she said with her voice raised, attracted by the light.

"Every part has been set carefully. The technicians have adjusted it again and again for half a year."

"Really?"

"Yeah," he nodded and moved away from her to ready his fighting stance. He swung the blade back and forth.

The feeling of the blade on his hand was different. He confirmed the Katana.

"Should it be heavier? The blade also needs..... It's a bit too long, so I should use the Sapphire Dite as a spare. If the blade can be thicker, then it can sustain the Steel Threads. This setting can be made on the Shim Adamantium Dite, but with the Adamantium Dite....."

It looked like he wanted to change the Dites he had into Katanas.

"..... Aren't you going to use this?" Nina pointed at the Psyharden Katana. It was an excellent Katana, yet Layfon didn't seem satisfied.

"Of course I need adjustments made on this Katana, but when comparing the quality of the materials, white alloy far exceeds that of metal and the green alloy. When I used the Dite in the past, it couldn't sustain my skill in Kei, so I decided to go for the aspect of cutting things apart."

"Is..... Is that so?"

"Yeah, besides, this adjustment was made when I was ten."

Nina was shocked.

"I'm used to wielding bigger Katana. In truth, I can use the Adamantium Dite better if it's heavier. The Shim Adamantium Dite suits me more just based on that."

He continued his explanation, facing a speechless Nina. "Of course, there are inconveniences if I keep using it. The inconvenience brought by Kei flow in a Katana used against a filth monster will cause errors in the swing of the weapon."

A siren cut through the air.

"Emergency? Is a city near?"

"Seems so. This is like training."

Layfon looked at the sky and turned his gaze to the city's legs. A city did appear ahead of Zuellni.

"Time to get ready."

"I'm going to find Harley-senpai to make some adjustments."

"Aa....."

"Then I'll be leaving now."

She watched him run off.

".... He's changed."

A sudden change. He had accepted his identity as a Military Artist. That should warrant a celebration. Whether it was for Nina or Zuellni, this was good news. But somehow, she didn't feel comfortable.

"He must have talked over this with Leerin."

That must be it.

This was probably a good thing, but on the other hand, she knew it was something she couldn't have affected. Having experienced the setback in Grendan, Layfon's current change did not come about because of Nina or anyone else.

Never mind.

She couldn't do this because she wasn't Leerin? Or because she forced herself too much?

"....." Nina shook her head and breathed out as if to let loose the feelings piling up inside her. Sunlight shone into the court. Today was another hot day.

Layfon ran. His feet were light, so light. In fact, his entire body felt light, as if power had filled him. Looking at the usual streetscape before him, it felt refreshing. Why was that so? He knew the reason behind it lay in the wooden box in his right hand.

He ran on an empty street. He ran, knowing clearly that he hadn't been abandoned and forgotten. He already knew when he was little. The children of his age had all been adopted by other people. Only he and Leerin had stayed in the orphanage. The kids who had been adopted and taken away never did return to visit them. When he grew up and had a talk with father, he knew this was a fact. At the same time, he realized he was still immature.

This didn't mean Derek didn't care for the kids who had left the orphanage. In truth, some kids caused trouble for their adopted families and were sent back to the orphanage. When that time came, Derek faced the adopted parents with determination and persistence. And Layfon didn't know that, as he was still little. Though he didn't feel it daily, he felt he had been kept behind when it was time for other kids to be taken away. One after another, the children left. Only he was left behind, and that made him feel lonely. Every time the day for a kid to leave rolled around , Layfon was always holding Leerin's hand. Leerin, usually strong and talented, always turned gentle and weak on that day. Even though he felt uncomfortable with her sweaty hand, he held onto it and never let go. And every time, she would tell him of her trouble . And Layfon would want to become stronger, stronger and stronger, so he could always stay by her side. So he would never let go of that hand. He didn't know when he had forgotten that feeling. The shortage of food in Grendan had shrouded that feeling , leaving it to hide deep in his heart.

He was always with Leerin in Grendan. It was the same when people challenged him for the title of the Heaven's Blade successor. Leerin's letters encouraged him when he was confused. And Leerin had come to Zuellni because of him. For that alone, he must not let go of her hand. Hence he must hold it tight. Hence he must win this battle.

The siren was a summons.

Holding the Dite in the box, holding the thoughts of Derek and Leerin, Layfon ran into battle.

It was after midday when Falnir contacted Zuellni. The sound of the edges touching echoed throughout the city. Layfon heard this sound in the building of the Alchemy course.

"..... Made it~~" Harley collapsed on a chair. "Come over and see."

The restored form of the Shim Adamantium Dite lay on the table. Compared to the Katana, the Shim Adamantium Dite was now longer in length. Light sparkled in the dark blade.

"I took the mode of the metal Dite and made it in powdered form. That should raise the sharpness of the blade."

Layfon prepared his stance. He couldn't make any large movements in the narrow room, but he nodded at the feeling of the blade in his hand.

"Perfect," he smiled.

"Re, really?" Harley smiled too.

"Well, this doesn't have much to do with the Military Arts Competition since you aren't allowed to hurt your opponent. But I tried merging the aspects of the Dites....."

"Then I'll go ahead. Counting on you for the Sapphire Dite."

"Ah, yes."

Layfon jumped out the window. Felli's flake was already waiting. It flew into his pocket.

"Sorry."

"Please hurry and get changed. A plan's already been drawn up.
"

"What do I do?" he asked as he leaped from building to building
.

"..... Instead of that, let's just solve what happened last night. I'm sorry."

"Ah, not at all..... It was my fault. Sorry."

"No..... So you've decided to hold the Katana."

"Yes, you and the Captain are right. I was wrong," he felt flustered at the seeming shadow in her words.

"I don't mean that. I mean your heart. Have you decided to continue fighting as a Military Artist?"

"Ah....." he breathed in deeply and didn't give an instant reply
.

"What?" her tone was icy.

"No, I haven't thought of that yet....."

Submerged in the joy of being allowed to use Psyharden, submerged in the feel of the Katana in his hand, he had totally forgotten it. No..... He had forgotten. That probably came about as a burden on his spirit from fighting as a Military Artist. He now held the Katana, but he hadn't resolved his past in Grendan. Still, this had nothing to do with whether he should continue to be a Military Artist or not.

"This feels like your style."

"..... Are you underestimating me?"

"I was just saying the truth."

"Wu....."

True. He could only see what was before him. He didn't protest against her words as he arrived at the Training Complex. He took out the flake before entering the changing room. He took up the clothes.

And next, he quickly made his way to the outer area of Zuellni.

"Sorry."

"No, it's good that you caught up."

Under Felli's guidance, he had arrived at where Nina was to confirm the situation. The signing of contracts had already begun.

"Eh? That person.....?" He noticed the older man standing beside Falnir's Student President.

"He's the representative of the Academy City Alliance."

"Eh, so it's that person."

That person wore a grey coat. He looked to be in his thirties. The Academy City Alliance. It managed all Academy Cities and exchanged information between cities. It was also responsible in buying and selling information to other Academy Cities.

"It seems he's in Falnir."

"So these people appear in Military Arts Competitions?"

"Seems so. Last time we had one in Zuellni, probably since there was a roaming bus. Not every city had one."

"I see....." Layfon looked at the man again.

He was a Military Artist that bore no weapon harness. That was probably hidden beneath his uniform. The lumpy part of his left side might hide a Dite. Layfon saw no openings from this person. He looked to hold some strength. Since it was the Academy City Alliance, it must hold several incredible Military Artists.

"Well..... Never mind that."

That had nothing to do with the present Military Arts Competition. Layfon turned his gaze to Falnir's Military Artists. They were all students. How would they fare? Though it was

difficult to speculate on the strength of a group, he could tell by looking at them that they held confidence. They might have won in other places.

Recently? Or.....

Their aura was frightening. Zuellni did win against Myath, but that was three months ago. Everyone had gradually come to forget the feeling they had in victory.

"Captain, what's our deployment?"

"Uh? Aa, this time we're in the frontline. Gorneo's team will infiltrate the city."

"I see....."

"What is it?" she asked.

"I have something to talk to you about."

"What? About the plan?"

"It isn't really a plan....."

"What is it?"

"Well....."

Dalshena came over too. He told them in a small voice. They both widened their eyes.

"..... Is that good?"

"But that's the basic."

"Well, even so....." Dalshena fiddled with her golden curls.

"But that's still an individual fight."

"It's ok. I think....." he nodded with a smile.

"Even if there's one more person, the feeling in battle won't be much different."

"True, if we do that, we can dampen their spirit....." Nina said after some consideration.

"Can we do that?"

"Though I'm not too good with it, it's just a matter of grabbing the right timing," she nodded. "Ok. Let's decide this then. Dalshena-senpai, please lead the front troop. Layfon and I will rush into the enemy formation afterwards. Is that all right?"

"Ok. Leave it to me," Dalshena nodded.

"Right, next is to win," Nina said with resolve.

Layfon smiled. Yes, next was to win.

At this time, Dixerio finally woke from his long slumber.

"As I thought..... It takes a long time to heal continuously."

He had been sleeping on a tree branch. He stood up and stretched, confirming his body condition.

"Looks ok."

The wounds caused by Barmelin had completely healed.

"Aaa, my left leg had become charcoal. One night's sleep wasn't enough to heal that," he laughed lightly in irony. Still, it had been a long time since he was injured.

Many tens of years had passed since his body turned into this condition. And the events he had experienced made him feel that time was extremely long and passed slowly. The network of Electronic Fairies that was formed inside the Aurora Field, which was called "En", and his fights against the Wolf Faces in recent years.

Just when did he stop growing? When did he stop being human and Military Artist?

Dixerio. He used to be a spoiled and arrogant kid living in the City of Strong Desire – Velzenheim. He had become like the two people that he met on that day.

Who were they? His current purpose was to confirm the answer of this question. However, he had something else to do before that. He must find the man that destroyed his city. That was why he infiltrated Grendan's Inner Court for the second time. He had found a violent welcome waiting for him both times.

He didn't get along with the Heaven's Blade successors. They were different from him, as they had obtained power as normal Military Artists. Though he knew a Heaven's Blade could fully release a wielder's potential, the result of that far exceeded his expectations. Either way, his misconception was formed when he was still a kid.....

"..... In that case, the 'motto' lives there too."

His expression turned sour. The girl he met before did get caught in this whole affair. Through the baptism of the Wolf Faces, her body had an easier time traversing the Aurora Field.

No. He should say that she had become less resistant to it.

"Anyway."

This was an urgent matter in this world. He got her involved in his fight without reason, and that saddened him.

"I must do something for her."

Something had happened in that city, so Dixerio had come to visit Zuellni several times. The possibility was high that that girl was the key. Either way, she had obtained the Haikizoku. And that implied..... She had no other choice but to walk the same path as him.

The Student Presidents signed the contract, shook each others' hand and returned to their own city. The representative of the Academy City Alliance returned to Falnir without a word.

The contact point of the cities was the main battlefield. Military Arts students from both cities stood in formation. They faced each other and waited for the signal to begin the battle.

Layfon looked at the opposing formation. He held the restored Shim Adamantium Dite. Blue phosphorescence reflected off the dark blade. The gazes of the enemy Military Artists gathered to one spot.

The sky was cloudless. Strong sunlight lit up the ground and steam rose in threads. Both Zuellni and Falnir bore the heat. Sweat rolled down Nina's face. Sweat moistened her hands.

"It's ok," he said.

"Don't look everywhere," she scolded.

"Don't worry. I know the timing."

"Wu....."

"Stay calm. If this works, we rush straight into the enemy formation."

"You said that so easily."

The flutes sounded at the same time from Falnir and Zuellni, signaling the beginning of the battle. At the same time, Military Artists from both sides shouted. The air vibrated from the impact of internal Kei.

"Go!!" Vance shouted.

Kei exploded from Dalshena. She was leading the front troop and was waiting for Nina's signal.

While studying Falnir's front troop, Layfon took a large breath. Just when he was about to give the signal before Nina gave hers.....

"Haaah!"

A thunderous voice filled the space between the two sides. Internal Kei variation – Sound of War.

Layfon had released his breath along with Kei. His voice sent Falnir's troop into confusion and chaos.

"Go!" Nina shouted. Dalshena rushed into the enemy's frontline. Her lance created an opening in the frontline.

"Second team, follow!"

As if to chase after Dalshena, Nina's team moved forward and expanded the opening that Dalshena had made.

Sharnid was waiting on the city's edge, somewhere to the right of the frontline. He was with the cannon team. Naruki was in Nina's team, and Felli had stayed behind for support work.

Layfon didn't have any subordinates. He made a huge leap and landed well ahead of Dalshena's team, right in the midst of Falnir's second team.

"What?"

"Wa!" A Falnir Military Artist shouted at the sudden landing of Layfon from above. Layfon swung the Katana. External Kei variation – Enreki.

A massive amount of Kei flooded out from Layfon, sweeping the Military Artists around him into the air.

"..... Fu," he made a sound as he confirmed his move. He had executed a Psyharden move that he hadn't used for a long time. It

appeared his skill hadn't gone rusty. He remembered he was in a battle. No time for him to sigh in nostalgia. He wouldn't underestimate his opponents.

His feelings were more intense and colorful than usual. He held the joy of the time when he boasted of his newly learned skills to Leerin.

Some Falnir Military Artists probably thought Layfon was full of openings. Someone attacked him from behind. He half turned around and hit his opponent's wrist with his elbow, making him drop his weapon. He then fought back the other Military Artists who sought to close in on him. He fought Kei with his Katana. For attacks that he didn't have time to counter with his weapon, he used his fists and kicks. He reserved his strength when he executed a kick, and he also used that chance to sweep up the dust and soil from the ground and create a dust screen. Sometimes, he countered using his enemy's weapon.

The school of Psyharden had never nurtured someone as incredible as Layfon. There was also a saying that said Heaven's Blade successors were nurtured in Grendan. Most of the Military Arts school in Grendan were branch schools that descended from a main school. That main school became famous because it had nurtured Heaven's Blade successors. Those that failed to give birth to any Heaven's Blades faded away with time. With the Psyharden school, no Heaven's Blade was born between its founding and Layfon's birth. Why then didn't it fade away like others? Because people who held Psyharden tended to survive their battles. And that was what Psyharden was like. The Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang became famous thanks to the skills of Psyharden.

It wasn't difficult for Layfon to evade the attacks aimed at him. But he suppressed his Kei and sustained the attacks because of the restrictions placed on him.

To people who knew Layfon in Zuellni, they might have found him "intolerable", but as Heaven's Blade successor who had to keep fighting the same filth monsters, that sense of danger was essential. Hence Layfon always stayed alone in the Training Complex to train his basics.

"What're you waiting for!" Dalshena's team had invaded Falnir's second line of attack. Their team had it easier because of Layfon's action. Next, Nina's team completely suppressed Falnir's second team. Falnir's frontline ended up collapsing.

"Ah, yes," Layfon said and made another leap.

Keep on moving and he should be able to confirm which moves he was more rusty with.

While in midair, he stiffened at a sudden gaze from somewhere.

(What?)

He cautiously searched for that presence but he couldn't feel it anymore.

(Was that my imagination? But.....)

He had always felt someone was watching him since Leerin came to Zuellni. That gaze was sharp, but it always disappeared when he noticed it. He didn't know who it was, but since he didn't feel any hostility from it, he chose to ignore it.

(But why now?)

He had thought that it might be a non-Zuellni Military Artist who was watching him from a distance. He couldn't fathom the reason behind that act, but that was a possibility. Besides, no normal Military Artist could catch up with Layfon's speed with his eyes.

(Who is it?)

Haia.....? But he shouldn't be in Zuellni anymore. The Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang was still in Zuellni, but they had announced that they had exiled Haia. The Student Council and the City Police had done a thorough investigation, and they couldn't find Haia and Myunfa. So it shouldn't be Haia. Then who was it?

"Aa, that was a close call," Savaris cringed on the top of the

Student Council building. He was right beside the flag. "As I expected, his sensitivity in this battle is higher than before. Well, he has been a Heaven's Blade successor. Close call. Close call."

No one could tell what he truly meant from his expression. In fact, he was enjoying himself.

"But he's finally picked up the Katana, his favorite weapon. Now this is getting more interesting."

Though he once showed displeasure in Layfon's performance, he was now very happy with his choice of weapon. Because the two of them would one day clash. He had heard of this from the current head of the Gang – Fermaus. Since the Gang aimed to take the Haikizoku, then sooner or later, it'd have to face Layfon. Savaris was disappointed at how relaxed Layfon had become in his peaceful life in Zuellni, but now he was happy to see him change.

Either way, he wanted to fight a strong Layfon. And since he himself also didn't have the Heaven's Blade, then the conditions matched.

"But..... When would that be?"

The Haikizoku wouldn't appear as long as the city was safe. He heard Zuellni had gone on a rampage before and had headed for filth monsters like Grendan, but that was before he arrived here.

He knew the reason. One, this had something to do with Grendan, and two, that person was in the Queen's care.

"..... I don't want to listen to Her Majesty's complaints. What should I do?"

Leerin Marfes. She had interfered with his mission, but he couldn't do anything to her. Because of her, he had been lazing around for three months. That was why he had time to train Gorneo and observe Layfon. Well, he couldn't say the three months were totally wasted.

"It's about time I got tired of this."

He thought of what to do. He could block Layfon's way when filth monsters attacked Zuellni, allowing Zuellni to face extreme danger. He remembered hearing from Gorneo of how Zuellni fought. Though it probably wouldn't face another group attack from larvae, a crisis still existed if a crowd of mature filth monsters came. But Savaris couldn't wait for filth monsters to show up. He had already waited for three months, and the battlefield of Grendan beckoned.

The other way was for him to create a crisis by destroying the city. Though the Haikizoku's hatred was bent on the filth monsters , it might come to possess someone in the face of danger. Either way, the person that the Haikizoku possessed at first did not face the danger of filth monsters at that time.

"..... How about I just do that now?"

What was ironic was that a battle was right before him. This kind of child's play fueled his impatience.

"I say, what do you think?" his gaze slid to that person.

"As expected from a Heaven's Blade successor. I can't hide from you."

A man wearing a grey coat appeared behind Savaris. A moment ago, he was just at the contact point of the cities. As the representative of the Academy City Alliance, he should have already returned to Falnir.

"I thought you might do something. What's going on?" Savaris said.

"Well....." the man shrugged. "I can't meet your expectations on my own."

"But you don't die, right? Nothing would harm you even if you die a hundred times. You give your opponent mental pressure."

"That's not possible. Though our thoughts are separated from our bodies, we are still weak in front of despair," he said simply.

He was one of the Wolf Faces.

"Is it ok to tell me this so easily?"

"Of course. Dying a hundred times is not enough to reach true despair."

"I see, since you have no real body, you can't feel pain."

Savaris remembered the foolish young man he met in Myath. That young man's fear of filth monsters was extreme and unusual. It must be a side effect of becoming a Wolf Face.

(What. As I thought, he can't match Layfon.)

He looked at the sky, bored.

"Then what do you want with me? Let's leave the conversation if you're here to persuade me to surrender. Grendan's battlefield is still the most attractive for me."

"I want to help you return to that battlefield quickly....."

"Right....."

"Aa, you don't believe me?"

"It's not that I don't want to believe. You're Grendan's enemy. Can I trust you like that?"

"Then do you plan to keep waiting?"

Savaris gave a bitter smile. This person knew of his thoughts and had suggested accordingly for the negotiation.

The man continued speaking without fear. "Filth monsters will attack Zuellni today."

"....."

A topic that Savaris had been waiting for.

"What's the catch of telling me this?"

"No matter. This is a filth monster with a name," the man said something that only people of Grendan would understand.

"This is becoming more interesting. The Haikizoku will definitely appear. What useful information. As thanks, I won't destroy your body."

"Not at all. I still haven't yet asked for your help," he said.

"Then what do you want me to help with?"

"We'll take the Haikizoku out of its vessel."

"Why?"

"Why? Don't you want the Haikizoku? It'll be troublesome to take it back like that. You can't be thinking of asking us for help when you're at your end?"

True. That made sense. Savaris did not have the tools to capture the Haikizoku. He'd probably use the same method as the Mercenary Gang. Find a random person and let the Haikizoku possess him. That wasn't enough. The Haikizoku would be very unstable because the vessel lacked willpower. In addition, Layfon would be there to interfere.

The Queen knew the Gang would fail in this mission, so she sent a Heaven's Blade over.

But once the Haikizoku had settled in its vessel, next was Savaris's turn to contend against it. He didn't think he would lose. Actually, it'd be interesting if the vessel was Layfon. In that case, he had to make sure he had enough strength left to fight Layfon after contending with the Haikizoku.

"But can your way ensure nothing will happen on the way with delivering the Haikizoku back to Grendan? If it was in a city, I could suppress it with force, but if it was on the roaming bus.....? "

"Uh....."

As he thought. This would get troublesome. Besides, that consciousness in Leerin might not take his side.

"We can take the Haikizoku off its vessel and hand it to you in its real form."

"You can do that?"

"Only we can do this."

It sounded like a good trade.

"Then what're you getting out of this? Do you want me to fight that filth monster?"

If that filth monster did have a name, then Layfon himself wasn't enough. This would also be difficult for Savaris as he didn't have his Heaven's Blade. But if they were to cooperate, they might defeat it.

"I want you to protect Zuellni."

Savaris's eyes widened at the unexpected. "You do know how to joke. According to what I saw in Myath, destroying Academy Cities is what you like."

"Yes, Myath doesn't mean much to us, but Zuellni is different. It has something that we want."

"I see....."

"But it takes time to obtain it. We'll be troubled if something is to happen to Zuellni."

"I see."

Was that the only reason? What were the Wolf Faces planning? Savaris was really curious. In that case, he better collaborate with them so he could return to Grendan earlier.

"Let's do this then."

"Good. Please look after me."

The man nodded and vanished. Speaking of which..... what did that man look like? All he saw was that grey coat.

"Uh, this is troublesome," he said, losing interest in the Wolf Face man.

What he was interested in now was the upcoming battle.

"A filth monster with a name..... I'm really looking forward to it."

How much could he do without a Heaven's Blade? That question made him really anxious.

Feeling the Kei running up her arm, Naruki released her Kei without hesitation.

"Ha!"

External Kei variation – Purple Lightning.

Thunder strikes shot from the chain of rope. The Military Artists caught by that rope fell down one by one.

"Fu....." Naruki retrieved the rope and sighed.

In the past three months, she had successfully learned the key points of Karen Kei under Gorneo's instruction. The move she executed was of Karen Kei. The Military Artists she caught did not faint. They just couldn't move as their nervous system was in chaos, leaving Zuellni's Military Artists ample time to deal the final blow. Naruki took back her gaze from the scene.

They didn't have a judge to decide whether a person was out of action in the platoon match even though a safety setting was installed in every Dite. Besides, a safety setting couldn't guarantee safety. A blade could still inflict heavy damage, and that was the same with Nina and Naruki's weapons. Sometimes, Military Artists would sustain severe injuries. They might even die. In truth , a guy the same age as Naruki had sustained a head injury during the match with Myath. She had visited him in the hospital. He didn't look reliable, but he was a good man. Fortunately, it wasn't a life threatening injury. But in the month after he was discharged, he always complained of headache. At present, his head would still hurt occasionally. Even modern medicine failed to completely cure brain and Kei-related injuries. That man might have died. This was what a Military Arts fight was like. No matter how many safety precautions were made, one fought with death.

Naruki couldn't agree with it. She couldn't do it, and that was why she left Joeldem. One had to fight filth monsters in order to survive. But what was a war for? Why should they fight over selenium mines? Why did the cities, the Electronic Fairies have to make humans fight? She didn't understand.

And that, she couldn't agree with.

Once she told her parents of her thought, they decided to allow her to study in Academy City. They thought she would die if she continued to think like that in Joeldem. Only death awaited her if she didn't fight. Her parents' decision was right.

Hence Naruki aimed to join the police force. Police's opponents were people who threatened the peace of the city. Till now, she had never doubted her decision in becoming a policewoman. However, right now she was part of a platoon, and she was fighting in the Military Arts Competition. She fought and she learned Karen Kei from Gorneo. What was with the change of heart? Actually, she knew. The event with the 10th platoon had changed her. Dinn had chosen the wrong path for the sake of the city. Did he fail because his choice was wrong? Or was it that even with a wrong decision, one could reach one's goal with a firm belief? Was there any mistake in the justice that she believed in? A closer study yielded the conclusion that one made mistakes because one was too loyal to one's belief. Did the action succeed in the end or fail? Naruki didn't understand, so she now fought in a fight she didn't want to participate in. What she couldn't accept might not necessarily be wrong. But what about the people who had a hand in changing her thinking?

Naruki's gaze turned to Nina. Holding the iron whips, Nina changed the team's movement according to the enemy's reactions. If the counterattack was strong, she would take the attack. If the counterattack was weak, she would increase her territory. No one needed a Psychokinesist's report to realize Nina was the captain, looking at the way she shouted and gave orders. As naturally, she concentrated on attacking. Naruki and the other Military Artists

became Nina's wall to reduce her burden. However, Nina would choose to attack even while defending. As long as she saw an opening, she would rush forward. Even though the strategy was aimed to keep Nina's team not too far away from Dalshena's, Naruki still thought it tactless. If Layfon didn't head alone into the enemy's ranks to cause a commotion, Dalshena's attack wouldn't have worked. Putting it the other way, the connection of the teams had turned harder to maintain because the fight was too smooth. The team led by the 16th platoon would have collapsed if not for their favorite Whirl Kei strategy.

"Captain, please stop for a bit!" Naruki shouted.

"Ah? Uh, yes....." Nina replied reluctantly.

Naruki calmed herself. She must stop her before anyone broke through the defense of Kei in the Captain's Dite.

"Captain!" she called again.

Nina finally halted her steps.

"You're going in too fast. What exactly are you thinking?" It was Felli's voice coming through the flake. "Please also tell Dalshena senpai not to keep moving ahead. You guys are too far away from the third team."

"But....." she looked ahead. "Layfon, he....."

"If I don't first stop you, I can't concentrate on persuading that happy idiot." Reproach filled Felli's voice.

A Psychokinesist could process gathered information all at the same time. Still, it was difficult for her to speak to different people at the same time.

"Sor, sorry....." Nina said and gave an order to Dalshena through the flake. "This is Vance's order. Join with the second wave and turn to defensive formation. Defend the areas we've gained."

"Roger."

"Really....." Felli didn't say anymore. She must be talking to Layfon.

Though they had stopped moving, many Falnir Military Artists still surrounded them. Naruki and the other members had turned to a defensive formation while Nina was giving the order. The team changed into a dense formation with Nina at the center of the circle. Not long after that, Dalshena's team retreated to meet up with Nina's team.

Since she was in the middle of the formation, Nina couldn't fight. She sighed.

"Damn!"

She wasn't relaxed at all. She was impatient with Layfon. He wasn't back yet.

"What is it?" Naruki asked. The heavy push forward back then seemed to have been pulled by Layfon.

"Did I think too highly of myself?" Dalshena sighed also. Sweat rolled down her face.

Naruki felt more at ease. No matter how beautiful her senpai was, she could sweat too. This scene didn't mean much, but it helped Naruki breathe.

Dalshena's gaze turned from Nina to her. "What's up with her?"

"Ah, no, it's Layfon. He seems different from usual. That's worrying."

True. Layfon's action was strange. He didn't give off that dark and shadowy feeling. Compared to before, he was happier and more carefree. So carefree that it was hard for her to accept it.

"..... He must have solved that problem with Leerin?"

"I think so too, but somehow, I feel he's really overdoing it....."

Yes. It felt hard to approach him before the intercity match. She also hadn't talked to him during the fight. And today, she got a feeling that he was relaxed up till the signal for the match to begin. Though he looked like he had plenty of room to spare, others couldn't help but think he was being careless.

Was that why Nina was worried? Naruki's instinct told her that wasn't it. Nina was worried..... She was probably using that as an excuse to lie to herself.

(Meishen would have felt down while saying, "That's great".)

Though Nina was happy that Leerin and Layfon had made up, she probably felt down for failing to help him. Naruki was probably feeling the same too. So useless. But perhaps she was dreaming to live such a useless life. She thought she would deceive herself like this.

(Has Leerin noticed?)

That Leerin herself felt something for Layfon. Nina should have known the reason behind Leerin's visit, yet she still chose to live with her. It must be hard for her to see Leerin and Layfon so close together.

Why was Naruki so useless?

The battle continued and Layfon still hadn't returned.

"So slow. Has she not convinced him yet?" Nina stumped her foot.

At this time..... A roar sounded in the air.

"What?"

As the battlefield was filled with noise, no one noticed something was nearing them. The Psychokinesists were concentrating on gathering information of the battle, so they didn't have spare time to look beyond the cities. The roar became a rumble, and the entire earth shook.

"Cityquake!?"

Naruki quickly threw away that speculation. A city's multi-legs being trapped inside a crack was the cause of a city's quake. Falnir and Zuellni had already stopped moving, so this wasn't it. Then what was it?

New rumbling sounded from in front of and behind the two cities. No one had yet to give the signal to stop the battle. However , all Military Artists had ceased fighting.

A shrill siren sounded above the battlefield to announce the attack of filth monsters. The sad wailing of Electronic Fairies. At the same time, countless number of larvae had appeared outside the cities.

Chapter 5 - Chaos

Vance was more frustrated and bitter than anyone when he saw the filth monsters appearing in this situation. This was the second Military Arts Competition and the chaos in the enemy city far exceeded his predictions. This was something for Zuellni to rejoice over. The first and second waves had already taken complete control of the battlefield. What they needed was to wait for Vance's defense team to defend against the enemies and obtain victory. However, Vance wasn't too focused on victory. After all, he was the Leader of the Military Arts course. As the chief commander of Zuellni's Military Artists, he had to grasp hold of the situation no matter what.

Filth monsters. The larvae had appeared on the outskirts of the city.

"Alchemy technicians, prepare to release the safety locks on the Dites. The team here and the cannon team are responsible for holding up the filth monsters. The rest of the teams, get your Dites' safety locks released and join the battle," he gave the orders through the flake and went to stand in front of the troops with a long staff in his hand.

"Listen up. Stop them. But don't be too reckless," he roared and jumped into the crowd of larvae.

The report on the invasion of the larvae had reached Karian.

"Who would have thought..... So unlucky," he said in a small voice as if he didn't want anyone to hear him. The rest of the Student Council members located in the underground conference room didn't have to hear what he just said.

"Switch on the city's defense system. If necessary, we have to use the cannon."

"But that's....." the head of the Business course objected. He couldn't ignore the consequence of using the cannon that would result in the city losing a large amount of its resources. It didn't matter that they used some of the resources now, but they needed to preserve the resources that could be used in the reproduction phase. For example, the metal and fuel used for every shot were all precious to the city. They were things that couldn't be recovered. Although the city could mine more resources in its route, it might sink into a period of a severe lack of resources.

"I understand you. But this is an emergency. It'd be too late if Military Artists became sacrifices."

"Isn't he here?"

No one needed to ask who "he" was but Karian shook his head.

"There's something else we need to be aware of," he then gave a detailed explanation.

What did it mean for the filth monsters to suddenly appear? Why did Zuellni and Falnir hold a Military Arts Competition in

the vicinity of filth monsters? Was it simply because both sides hadn't noticed it? And was this the same as last time with a female filth monster giving birth underground? However, the report said there were only around 30 larvae. The number was far lower than before. According to a report from another Psychokinesist, a huge something laid beneath Zuellni's multi-legs. The larvae seemed to have come from that "something" which was broken. Looking at the damages on the multi-legs, it appeared that "something" had been tossed from a far distance to crash into Zuellni's multi-legs. If that was the case, could a normal female filth monster undertake a feat like this?

"I don't think so."

Felli's flake was currently heading for that direction. Everything suggested this attack wasn't as simple as it seemed.

"..... Meaning there might be an aged phase filth monster around?"

All members of the Student Council had accepted the knowledge of filth monsters they had heard from Layfon. An aged phase filth monster had given up its reproduction functions. Instead, it turned to evolving.

"I'm not sure. Anyway, the Military Artists are fighting the 30 or so larvae. So just in case, we'll have to use that insurance," Karian said and urged everyone to action.

One group rushed out of the conference room and the other group stayed behind to discuss further strategies.

"..... Really, I've already acted the villain once to ensure our victory in a Military Arts Competition, and then we have this. So annoying."

The last time was the Salinvan Guidance Mercenary Gang. This time was filth monsters. What next? He didn't want to think further, but he still fell into contemplation.

Unfortunately, his prediction had come true.

Zuellni and Falnir's Military Artists all witnessed the coming of the larvae.

"What's that.....?"

Thanks to the connection between the teams and the speedy work of the Dite technicians, the safety lock releasing procedure had gone ahead smoothly. Zuellni was now in a counterattack mode. Although Layfon had taken care of most of the larvae, Zuellni's Military Artists had eliminated around 10 larvae when he returned from Falnir. It was fortunate that only a few Military Artists had sustained light injuries. This was the result of Vance's speedy reaction and everyone's daily training. And luckily, the larvae had gathered in one place. But this wasn't the time to rejoice over luck.

Everyone's gaze was now on the thing floating in the air. A black hole that slowly moved as it expanded. Psychokinesists

voiced their warnings. A sound grew louder as the hole expanded. When he understood the meaning of that sound, Vance shouted, " Everyone, retreat!!"

Something as massive as a mountain had appeared. All Military Artists began retreating from the city's outskirts.

An intense and ear-piercing rumbling filled the space, shaking the entire city and making Military Artists' knees go weak. Pillars of earth rose up from outside the city to meet the sky. Soil particles fell through Zuellni's air shield.

A moaning of metal sounded behind the retreating Military Artists as the rain of soil hit them. The original form of that noise was finally confirmed. A large pillar on the outskirt of the city... one of the city's multi-legs broke before their eyes and fell onto the earth.

"Damn!" Vance burst out.

The rain of soil, not yet filtered by the air purification system, fell to make new wounds. It wasn't enough to cause death, but it was enough to lower the students' morale.

The rain of soil stopped after the pillar of soil disappeared.

Many more larvae appeared from where the multi-leg had fallen. Vance could deeply feel the impending crisis. Someone had thrown over the larvae. Because whatever huge thing that carried the larvae came from somewhere so far away, even Psychokinesists failed to detect it. Vance failed to imagine the

power behind this. This attack would never end if they couldn't defeat the real enemy.

"Damn....."

The number of new larvae was about the same as the first wave of larvae. Zuellni's attack power was enough for it. However, they couldn't predict the location of the third wave. If the third wave came from the side of the city, then Zuellni's attack power would have to spread out, and that would lower the speed of attacking. And if every time a toss of "something" managed to damage Zuellni.....

"Damn!"

With staff in hand, he gave the order to attack. They must eliminate the larvae before them. But what next?

"ARR!" Vance shouted. As the chief commander, he couldn't show his weakness here.

Layfon pinched his nose. He remembered this feeling of pollutants burning his nose. Numerous larvae lay beneath him. He could defeat them in one swift moment if he used the steel threads, but Harley currently kept the Sapphire Dite. Thinking that he couldn't use it, he showed a bitter smile. Harley and Kirik were making adjustments on the Sapphire Dite, and that would take time. If Layfon returned now and asked someone to fetch the Sapphire Dite for him, he'd probably be granting that person relief.

He looked at the outskirts of the city. A scenery of the wilderness that he was already used to seeing. Since Zuellni was so hot, it must have moved into the tropics. The third wave came straight after the second wave attack. It didn't cause direct damage to Zuellni, but as Vance had worried, another side of the outskirts was lacking in attack power.

While still counterattacking the second wave, Vance ordered the first unit, led by the 17th platoon, to take care of the third wave larvae.

"Seems we can rest a little bit."

"..... Seems so," Layfon nodded at the voice. He turned around and saw tiredness on Nina's face. Exhaustion was unavoidable since they had been participating in the Military Arts Competition, faced the sudden emergency and were now fighting filth monsters.

His nose still hurt.

This level of pollutants wouldn't bring him any life-threatening danger. Judging by how the outside scenery blurred and twisted, the density of the air filter had increased. No more pollutants would leak into the city. Vance's orders for other teams sounded from the flake. The first unit was ordered to wait at its location and defend its area. But the Military Artists' gazes were attracted to the figure outside the air shield. Falnir. When Zuellni was fighting against the second wave of filth monsters, Falnir had suddenly moved..... Fled. This meant Zuellni had become a target. Falnir had chosen to abandon Zuellni and escape.

"..... I can't blame them."

"True."

Complicated feelings filled Nina's voice. Yes, the people living in Falnir were not responsible. Just like the students in Zuellni, they drifted in a region in this wilderness and had to rely on their city alone to survive. The city's consciousness, the Electronic Fairy, had made the decision to leave. One couldn't judge an Electronic Fairy. It had only made the best decision to protect the people living in the city, and as such, Zuellni had been left behind. This wasn't a vile act. It shouldn't be.

Almost all Military Artists had witnessed the moment of Falnir's leaving. The sound of metal denoted the breaking up of the contact point, and at that moment, two shining things appeared. One was the figure of a young girl. The other was of a grown male. Many people hadn't seen these two figures before, but they all knew what they were. Zuellni and Falnir's Electronic Fairies. Falnir's aura was like a beast, courageous. On the contrary, Zuellni appeared innocent and naive with its long hair swaying behind her. But there wasn't a feeling of inferiority and superiority due to the difference in appearance.

Falnir's eyes were closed. Zuellni gave an imperceptible nod.

Light expanded from the two Electronic Fairies and clashed, vanishing the next moment. Next, Zuellni changed. A sudden intense light blinded her figure, and a teenage girl was revealed.

Then the two Electronic Fairies disappeared. Falnir moved away from Zuellni.

"What do you think?"

"How should I put it....." Layfon said, perplexed. He felt the two Electronic Fairies had said something during that time and had made a decision. The end result was Falnir's leaving. If that was the case, then what had happened? What was the meaning behind Zuellni's growth?

".....I think Falnir has given the victory to Zuellni."

"Uh?" he reacted, surprised at Nina's conclusion.

"I think some kind of relationship exists between Electronic Fairies. The two of them must be discussing, and they made a decision about who won and about the current situation. They might have compromised. That was why they showed themselves. "

Yes. That explanation seemed plausible. The two of them appeared to have discussed something. Finally, Zuellni had accepted something. That probably was just it. In that case, why did Falnir give Zuellni the victory? Because Zuellni had the advantage at the time of the Military Arts Competition? Or was it guilt for abandoning its fellow Electronic Fairy? Layfon didn't understand. Besides, this wasn't the time to dwell on speculations.

The two of them looked at Zuellni's broken multi-leg. Either way, this had become a problem.

"Zuellni can't move?"

"It has lots of multi-legs. I think it can still move even though it's lost one....."

But one couldn't quite make that conclusion since Zuellni wasn't moving right now. Perhaps it was already having trouble maintaining its balance. Other areas of Zuellni might also have been damaged. Layfon looked at the sky.

"Still haven't found it?" He said to Felli's flake. Felli was currently searching for the location of the thing that was throwing the larvae over. Only she could spread out and control flakes both inside and outside the city. Karian had sent out probes too, but they hadn't found anything.

Two waves of larvae came from the same direction, so what Felli was searching for should be in that direction. If she discovered it, Layfon would immediately move. Only an aged phase filth monster could execute this feat. Probably a very ancient filth monster too.

"Still haven't found the target within 30 kilomels."

"I see."

30 kilomels. It wasn't possible to cover that distance without a bike. There was the problem of the bike's speed and the endurance

of the suit against pollutants. Compared to that, one should also consider the possibility of a long running fight and being unable to make it back because the city was too far away. But with a bike, one should have a higher chance of returning as the bike could carry food, and the Psychokinesist would also be with him. But thinking of how that filth monster could throw something so far from 30 kilomels away.....

His nose still hurt even though the pollutants were gone from the air. No. If this was caused by pollutants, he should have a nosebleed. Then what was it?

"Haven't you ever thought that the smell in the air changes before a battle?"

Layfon recalled that voice.

"I get excited whenever I feel that. Aah, a strong enemy is coming. I wonder how high of a level my body can reach this time. "

Those lines felt surreal to him, but he could now understand some of that feeling. The tension one felt in the face of a strong enemy. In the past, he had never wanted to see how much strength he had. He only focused on the reward he would get after defeating his enemies. Of course, it wasn't a performance to increase one's power. An opening would make one weak, and weakness meant death. He couldn't make money if he died. That was his naive theory.

For some reason, he felt that if he now possessed the feeling he had during those fights, he might not be able to defeat this filth monster. But if it were that person, he probably wouldn't think like that. He would only want to fight his enemy.

In the past, Layfon only thought of how to earn rewards. Failure was possible, and his only choice was to flee if he did get trapped in that situation. This meant he had relied too much on Grendan. The current situation was different. If Layfon lost, no one in Zuellni could take his place. No, to say it correctly, this wasn't a problem of losing or not losing.....

(Over 30 kilomels.....)

He hoped that thing was somewhere close to 30 kilomels. 50 kilomels would take up a lot of time. And what should they do if it was over 100 kilomels? The bike would have to run not on a city's street, but on the arid land. The burden on the tires would destroy them. Besides, the longer Layfon was away, the more larvae would be thrown to Zuellni. What would the result be if 30 larvae were constantly thrown to Zuellni? The Military Artists would have more strength if not for the Military Arts Competition. Losing to the filth monster wasn't what made Layfon scared. He was scared that when he returned, Zuellni would already be destroyed.

(Aa, why am I only realizing that now.)

This wasn't Grendan.

In Grendan, the Queen would ensure the city's safety even if all Heaven's Blades were sent outside. But Zuellni's strength wasn't as high. It didn't have a Queen. It didn't have Lintence, Savaris, Delbone, Cauntia, Reverse, Troyatte, Ruimei, Barmelin, Kanaris, or Tigris. Even though they weren't here now, Layfon still felt there were people there to take care of the defense behind him.

(Why now.....)

Leerin's figure appeared in his mind. If something happened to her when he was away... If she became food for the larvae..... That thought was enough to numb his limbs. He felt like his feet were glued to Zuellni as if they had taken root.

(Please, find it within 50 kilomels.)

But the report that came to him after a few hours failed to grant his wish.

"At 50 kilomels, and no target spotted."

During Felli's report, Layfon was fighting the 5th wave.

A positive report finally reached the office of the Student Council the next morning.

"Thanks for the work. You should go and rest."

"Then I'll take a rest."

Karian touched the flake in his breast pocket as a way of comforting his sister. But.....The distance was a problem. 150 kilomels. He could not imagine the power behind that something that could throw a huge rock from 150 kilomels away. He didn't even have the strength to guess that power. He might glint some information if he asked students from the Alchemy and the General Studies courses, but he had no strength to hear those reports. A Military Artist who could defeat such a foe.....

"Only him."

But Karian had felt the same uneasiness that Layfon was feeling . 150 kilomels. This was about the same distance as the last time when Layfon went to fight the aged phase filth monster. Taking the terrain into consideration, it'd take one day to reach the destination. No one could guarantee what the filth monster would do during that time. Perhaps it would do other things. Even filth monsters had things to take care of. So how long could Zuellni hold? They were now fighting against the 8th wave. Each wave had become slower than its predecessor. But they couldn't let their guard down.

The Military Artists were exhausted. Karian must make a decision.

They could shoot down the larvae group with the support of Psychokinesists, but that had its limit.

"Can I only leave it to him? But....."

An Electronic voice sounded, coming from the bottom of the building. The female receptionist sounded shaky, saying someone was here to see him. Karian immediately understood her reaction after hearing the name of the guest. He had seen him two times. Once during Zuellni's madness, and the other time during the match with Myath.

"What're you planning this time?"

"Nothing. We sell 'strength'. This should be essential under this situation," the electronic voice sounded as the door closed.

A person wearing a cold mask. No one could tell whether it was male or female. However, Karian remained calm despite the uniqueness of this person – Fermaus Foa, the Mercenary Gang's representative. Not the leader but the representative. Was it because he was a Psychokinesist?

Karian nodded. "I see. You only appear now to push up the price?"

"Not only that. There's the event in the past too. In truth, this side feels awkward visiting you."

"Uh, meaning.....you're willing to help to compensate for the earlier event?"

".....I never thought you would be one to hold a grudge."

"I don't forget people with bad personalities," he pushed away the hair from the side of his face. As he had not had any sleep, his

hair had lost its shine. He had put aside his glasses too. His countenance right now was extremely exhausted, and the headache that came whenever it wanted urged him to stop thinking, but he kept at it.

He needed the Mercenary Gang, but what was their purpose?

"We can leave anytime, but then we can't reach our purpose," Fermaus said.

Karian wondered whether he said it to alleviate the atmosphere or that he had already guessed Karian's thought.

"This is the best time to obtain the Haikizoku. It's not interesting to be hated if we fail to retrieve it."

"......So you want to control the situation?"

"Yes. We're on the boundary of winning and losing. Let us reinforce you. Of course, we won't ask for money in return."

"The reward is the Haikizoku?"

"According to the situation, it might be the possessed Military Artist," Fermaus said without holding back.

"......So you want me to abandon Zuellni's student? Do you ask for this regardless of how I answer you?"

"You should know that the current situation is different."

True. They were reducing the number of larvae, but if they kept fighting like this, people might die. They already had 11 students heavily injured, and numerous students sustained light injuries. It was lucky that no one had died so far. But that was just a problem of timing. The possibility of death would rise if Layfon left Zuellni. This was why Fermaus chose this timing to show himself. Felli had said that he was an incredible Psychokinesist. He must have also discovered the thing throwing the larvae and so gave his suggestion to Karian based on his speculation? Or, had he hidden a flake in this room and eavesdropped on Karian's conversation with Felli? Either way, the other side held the upper hand. This masked person seemed to be saying "Here is the fighting power that you want".

"All right," he said, nodding slowly.

"Then the deal is sealed," Fermaus said. Karian watched him leave.

"Are you serious?" the reproachful voice came from the flake in his breast pocket. It appeared Felli hadn't been resting.

"Shouldn't you do something before I answer you?"

"I already searched the room. There's no hidden flake. He might have retrieved it already, or it might not be there in the first place."

"Good."

As expected of brother and sister. Satisfaction filled him with his sister's action. He smiled.

"Don't try to cover it up."

"We do need their fighting strength."

"But....."

"Yes, but. You don't think your brother will sacrifice people's lives?"

".....That is possible."

So his sister did harbor such great hate for him. Perhaps Layfon was one of that reasons. That must be it. But, never mind.

"Get Nina Antalk to monitor them."

He had heard from Nina of the events when she went missing. As long as the Haikizoku was here, Zuellni might go on a rampage . Hence, he had listened to Nina's explanation. However, Nina also had a stubborn side to her. That wasn't because she was dissatisfied with the Student Council. She had a mission. As such, not wanting to waste more time, he released her from the room. He wondered whether Fermaus knew that the Haikizoku was now in Nina. The Gang must also have something planned. Zuellni had calmed down with Nina's return. No one could deny that truth.

"We must protect her when the time comes.....At least until Layfon returns," he said, even though he felt they wouldn't do well

in resisting the Gang. At the same time, he cursed himself for having no choice but to make such a decision.

"Restoration."

The Sapphire Dite shone at the cold key word. A Katana. The blade was now thicker to maintain its new form. It was more suitable to call it a Katana used to cut wood. Layfon swung the Katana to feel it, and restored it to the Dite form, putting it back into the weapon harness. Next was the Adamantium Dite. He restored it. A Katana. Not much different from before. The shape of it had changed according to the metal Dite – the Dite that Derek had given him.

"How is it?" Harley asked anxiously. The exhaustion of working for days without sleep showed on his face.

"Good. Very good."

He restored it and put it into the weapon harness, feeling the weapon harness's added weight and the fight looming before him. 150 kilomels was too far away. No matter what, he must reach it before midnight.

(What should I do during that time?)

He had received Karian's instruction from the flake. Karian had told him that the Mercenary Gang would help, and that Fermaus was in charge of the Gang.

The Gang would do this even though they kidnapped Felli before. But Layfon held gratitude for the Gang's resolve. The Gang could take care of the larvae even without Haia. However, the enemy could control the number of larvae it threw and the direction it threw from. Nothing was guaranteed even with the Mercenary Gang's participation. But Layfon couldn't hope for more. He knew the situation was against them. The longer he dragged it, the worse the situation would become.

After thanking Harley and Kirik, he headed for the bottom of the city. He would take the bike and drive for the filth monster. He took the lift to the ground floor and put on his protective suit as he traversed the corridors.

Nina appeared underneath the city.

"Captain, don't you need a rest?"

"You need a rest more than me."

The team that the 17th platoon led was given time to rest. The short two hours were enough.

"Isn't it better to take a rest?" Nina said.

"I need rest before the battle, but that's only if the action hasn't been shifted ahead."

The filth monster hadn't moved for now. But who knew when it would take action?

"I see," she sighed.

"Compared to that, you should adjust the amount of Kei you use. Reduce the number of times you use external Kei in a long fight. That's different from Internal Kei, as it can't be recycled. Especially with you, the type who uses heavy weapons....."

"How can you still worry about others now?" she smiled bitterly .

"I'm sorry....."

"No, you're not wrong.....It's just, I'm too unreliable."

He wanted to say "Not at all", but he swallowed it.

"Kongoukei and Raijin. I already learned these two moves, but I still can't support you....."

"Captain....."

"But I can at least guarantee you that we'll protect Leerin. Please rest at ease."

"Ah....."

Did she come here especially to tell him this? So that he could fight without worries. He wanted to say sorry, but he felt that wasn't what he should be saying now. The Katana was now in his weapon harness. Nina had done everything to persuade him to hold the Katana. What was he like to that Nina at that time? He wanted to apologize, but this wasn't the time to say sorry. He had already given it.

"Thanks."

Nina's eyes widened then she smiled. She smiled as if she was relieved.

He was drawn to that smile of hers.

"......? What?"

"Ah, no..... Nothing. I'll definitely win and come back."

"Don't be reckless."

"Yeah, I know."

Nina moved aside. He opened the door. A bike waited for him in the dim space.

"You must return," she said as the bike took him out. When he turned his head around, the door had already closed.

He had arrived later than he expected. It was deep into the night. He stopped the bike 10 kilomels from the target and hid himself to observe it.

"So huge....."

This thing was like a monster with four legs. It had lost its wings to only move on the ground. With its abdomen on the

ground, it kept a resting pose like a gigantic statue. But the part jutting from its back that looked like a gargantuan chimney didn't look like part of something living.

"......This shoots out the larva," Felli's voice came from the flake in his helmet.

"Can't tell whether it's male, but this aged phase monster can reproduce," Layfon said as he continued observing. He wanted to jump in and eliminate it now, but looking at its size, he didn't know where to begin.

".....Got it."

"Eh?"

"I just checked the ground. There's a huge hole there. I think there's a female filth monster there."

"You mean....."

"Yes, I can't see it from here, but a tube-like thing is connecting its abdomen to the female's abdomen. That might explain how it sucks in the larvae."

And shot to Zuellni like bullets.

"In that case, I must first....." he took out the Adamantium Dite and the Sapphire Dite.

"Fon Fon? Shouldn't you wait till the morning? You should rest first....."

"I can take care of the larvae."

"But it might notice the light when you restore the Dites. You must remain calm when you move."

Sunlight could cover up the light of the Dite, but not during the night. If he did so, he'd start the battle. How tired was he right now? He hadn't slept for two nights, but he had just drank the dense nutrient liquid to replenish his strength, and his Internal Kei flow was in good condition. What about psychologically? He took a deep breath. No problem. It had calmed down. And his Kei vein? He did fight in the Military Arts Competition and against the larvae, but that level of fatigue was light. No problem.

He had the Adamantium Dite. Looking at this filth monster, it was at the level of gaining a name. That thought made him uneasy, but in this situation, he couldn't have any false hope. All he could do was attempt what he could do.

"I'm going in."

"Wait..."

He restored the two Dites without waiting for her to finish. The filth monster reacted to the light. Its body shook. However, the skin of a filth monster just climbing out of slumber could not immediately regain its level of hardness. Layfon let the steel threads from his left hand run into the filth monster's abdomen to move through the tube into the ground. A bad feeling came from the steel threads.

"Tsk."

The cannon on the filth monster's back swelled. Layfon tried cutting the tube with the steel threads but failed. The external Kei was deflected. Smoke rose from the abdomen. He jumped up to swing the heavy Adamantium Dite. His target was the mouth of the cannon.

The colossal thing jumped along with the massive pressure. The pressure prevented Layfon from landing on the mouth of the cannon. His Kei move was executed as he lost his balance.

Extermal Kei variation – Sendan.

The Kei cannon rebounded off the filth monster's body and failed to damage it.

"Wu!"

He adjusted his body for the landing. During this time, the steel threads had killed off the female filth monster and the left behind larvae. But he had only killed some of the larvae. The rest were already in the cannon.

The filth monster stood up, leaving behind the useless tube. The sound of rock breaking came from the massive body. Layfon put the handles of the Dites together. The blade of the Katana pointed to the left of his waist. His left hand held its handle.

Psyharden technique – Flame Cut.

The move he executed earlier, Sendan, had given him an idea of how hard the outer skin of the filth monster was. Hence, he chose to use another technique against it. As long as he managed to cut out a part of the outer skin, he could concentrate on attacking that wound.

A filth monster's skin was softer once it emerged from its sleep. As tiny cracks ran through the outer skin when the filth monster stood up to spread its limbs, Layfon disappeared, leaving behind flying sand. He reappeared underneath the filth monster's abdomen.

Flame cut.

External Kei exuded from the blade. Along with the Kei covering his left hand, the two Kei merged to become flame. Pressing those two powers together, he swung the Katana down.

Flame return.

The second swing of the Katana opened the wound further apart. Body liquid spilled. Layfon didn't stop moving. A Whirl Kei jump took him to the tail end of the filth monster. The enemy bent down at the severe wound, causing the earth to groan intensely. Was it too hurt to move? Or did it want to crush him? Or that it just wanted to protect its wound.....

It was too late to give the filth monster a third attack. Layfon defended against the filth monster's counterattacks as he pulled his distance apart from it. Holding the handle of the Adamantium

Dite, he concentrated his strength on the Sapphire Dite. The steel threads were still underneath the enemy's abdomen. He wanted to cut open the enemy's body from its inside, but...

"Tsk."

Trapped in the heavy muscles, the steel threads had failed to move. He only managed to pull them out by pouring external Kei into them. The filth monster leaped, wanting to crush him with its weight. The rebound of its leap kicked up a screen of dust. Layfon jumped away.

As he turned away in his jump, his gaze met that of the filth monster's. It was a monster, but its mouth didn't look that ferocious. It had eyes. Multiple eyes that seemed to be its only difference from a human being.

It opened its mouth. Sensing danger, Layfon jumped away again. A loud and shrill sound came from the place that his jump was taking him to.

"What's that?"

The sharp things shooting from the filth monster's mouth stabbed the earth.

"Its teeth," Felli said.

The filth monster had shot a few of its numerous teeth in its mouth.

"So troublesome."

Who would have thought it had such tools along with its size..... .. Layfon kept moving, preventing himself from presenting a still target for the monster. His enemy moved to keep up with him and he in turn moved away. This prevented him from attacking it.

"What is it?"

"It's hard. It's huge, and it's hard to grab a good timing. Difficult ," he replied as he ran. He attempted to ready an attacking pose with the steel threads while drawing a distance from the filth monster. However, it already took too much strength to cut open the outer skin. Not only that. The wound he made earlier had already healed.

"As expected. Amazing revival power," he said and landed in front of the filth monster.

"Fon.....!" Felli's voice filled his helmet.

The sharp teeth flew for him. He stepped back to avoid the assault.

"About 500 meters is the shooting range."

"Fon Fon?" she said, confused.

He didn't reply. He ran, matching the filth monster that tried to close in on him. If he had wanted, he could draw it away, but he didn't do that. The certain speed that he maintained dictated the filth monster's direction.

Someone was watching this fight from far away.

"What's he doing?"

The man sitting on the bike replied to the flake. "Probably measuring its strength? It seems hard to end the fight quickly, so he must be planning and doing this to figure out his opponent's true strength."

"I see," Fermaus said. "Then aren't you going to take action? Aren't you planning to fight it?"

Savaris had done little in the past three months. Today's scene was what he had been waiting for, but he never thought this would happen so far away from Zuellni. What were they thinking?

"Don't worry, I'll obey the Queen's order.....They should also abide by the agreement."

"Agreement?"

"Well, that depends on the result. Compared to that, I'm more interested in what Layfon wants to do," he said in a relaxed manner.

What was this man planning? Fermaus couldn't tell. Even though Savaris had been in Zuellni for three months, Fermaus didn't see him much. It seemed Savaris had appeared before Gorneo several times, but he didn't live with his brother. Fermaus had tried trailing him, but Savaris had easily thrown him off his

trail. In the end, he could only give up and wait for the other person to come.

But the Mercenary Gang was impatient. Because of Haia's actions, the Gang was almost disbanded. Now they wanted to return quickly to Grendan. Savaris' arrival was to them an urge, but he didn't say anything to them. It was as if he didn't care at all. However, he had suddenly appeared before him. The Gang's morale was low. Fermaus had already explained to the members about what had happened. If not for this filth monster's attack, he probably couldn't unite them.

(Because we relied too much on Haia in the past.)

Fermaus couldn't do this alone. Not because he was a Psychokinesist, but because he was firmly seen as a strategist by others. They had already accepted him as a strategist, and he himself was used to supporting the leader. It was hard for everyone to accept his changed role. Besides, Savaris was here to replace Haia, yet Savaris didn't care to contact them.....

(.....I have to keep this home for him.)

Considering that Haia might return, Fermaus did all he could to keep this home together.

".....Never mind," Savaris said, submerged in heavy feelings.

"Ha?"

"I originally wanted to see what Layfon was doing, but never mind. I'm tired of observing. It's been three months," he said and took the bike.

Trouble and annoyance in Fermaus's mind.

(Aa, that guy has never thought of us.)

Savaris just did whatever his personality wanted.

"Good," Layfon nodded. He had grasped hold of the filth monster's strength.

"Then what do you plan to do?" Felli asked. She had been observing him.

"I can't defeat it with a normal method," he said.

"No way....."

"The Dite isn't hard enough. If I don't use it well, it won't last."

It wasn't because the Dite was bad in its filtering function. Only a Heaven's Blade could sustain all of Layfon's Kei.

"Even if I have that, that doesn't mean I can fully suppress it. After all, the opponent can be given a name....."

"So, time to escape?"

Her suggestion was the safest option. The larvae he destroyed earlier were the last group, so the danger to Zuellni was gone. That was why he now had time to think through some strategies.

He put the filth monster at bay as he talked with Felli.

"No, if I do that, it'll probably head for Zuellni."

"Then.....?"

Though he wanted to drag out the time to weaken his opponent , the first to use up all the strength would probably be Layfon himself. The filth monster could ignore its wounds and let them heal, but with Layfon, he had nothing to defend against the pollutants if his suit was damaged. A long fight was not the best possible decision.

"I've a way. Can't guarantee though..... How's Zuellni?"

".....Who'd have thought you still have the time to worry about that."

"True.....Sorry," he apologized. Yes, because he already decided to trust them.

"Stop thinking of other things. Just tell me what you're planning . If there's something I can do to help, I'll do it."

"Then please set the Psychokinesis mine in the place....." he noticed something.

"What?"

A large flow of Kei suddenly appeared and a figure wearing the coat of the Mercenary Gang stood in the direct line of Layfon's gaze.

"Haia?" Layfon said and then rejected that thought. The color of the Kei was different. And.....

"Bare-handed?"

No, Dites were equipped on his hands and feet. Hand to hand combat. And Layfon had seen him before.....The man moved. He almost failed to capture this man's movement.

"Eh? No way....." he doubted his eyes.

It wasn't because the man's movement was too quick. The color of the Kei, the movement, and.....

One swing of the man's fist sent the filth monster flying.

"Eh? Eh?"

Confused. But if it was that person, he would definitely do this. The man continued to rain down his fists on the side of the filth monster's abdomen. The enemy's outer scales fell like flakes. Layfon could tell how happy this person was. A fighting maniac.

"Savaris.....san?"

His only conclusion. Layfon jumped to the ground.

"Fon Fon?"

He increased the density of Kei. Though he didn't know what just happened, this was the best timing to attack.

Internal Kei variation – Water Mirror.

His figure disappeared in the screen of dust that he himself had kicked up. The next moment, he reappeared on the other side of the filth monster, the other side of where Savaris was attacking. He and Savaris had perfectly sandwiched the opponent between them . Layfon attacked. As if knowing his thoughts, Savaris pushed the face of his palm into the filth monster.

Psyharden technique – Hamonnuki. External Kei variation – Gourikitetsupa Kouga.

Layfon's move peeled off the entire filth monster's outer skin to damage its internal cells. At the same time, Savaris' attack dealt a heavy blow to the opponent's internal structure. The filth monster groaned and moaned under the two severe attacks.

"".....Uu."

Layfon jumped away and kept his distance from the enemy. A part of the blade he was holding had turned red. Black smoke issued from the gap in the weapon. If he kept releasing his Kei, the Adamantium Dite might not last.

"Aa, as I thought. We couldn't fully suppress it," Savaris said in a relaxed manner, appearing beside him. The equipment on his hand had also changed color.

"Savaris-san, where's your Heaven's Blade?"

"I can't just take it outside anytime I like."

"Unbelievable."

Layfon watched the sky. It was hard to gain powerful reinforcements, yet Savaris was limited in the same way as he was.

"Not at all. I'm quite happy. Don't you find this great to know how weak the outside Military Artists are? Ah, you've already experienced it."

Layfon watched him with a cold gaze.

"Are you after the Haikizoku?"

"Yes," he nodded without hiding anything. "But this seems more interesting now."

"Why did you.....No, the person who delivered Leerin....."

"Yes, that was me," he admitted.

"....."

Strange. No matter how lucky she was, as a normal person, it wasn't possible for Leerin to traverse the battlefield of the Military Arts Competition. He had thought of her receiving help, yet he never thought it was a Heaven's Blade successor.

"Why is the Queen doing this to obtain the Haikizoku?"

"Uh, I can't answer you, especially now that you've left Grendan ."

"....."

"It's got nothing to do with you," Savaris said. "Well, let's put that aside. We have to defeat this monster, right? I haven't fought with you since the battle against Behemoth. At that time we had the Heaven's Blades and Lintence. We were also on the outskirts of the city, so it was all right to sustain injuries. But now we don't have Lintence or the Heaven's Blades. And we're only wearing this kind of suit. Aaaa, so many disadvantages. I just want to dance."

"As you wish," Layfon restored the Adamantium Dite into its Dite form and returned it to the weapon harness. He had to let it cool down a bit before using it again. Instead, he restored the Shim Adamantium Dite.

"If I can't defeat it, then it matters not whether you're here or not ."

"Oh? Well said."

Even so, Layfon was happy to have Savaris here. The filth monster had been rendered immobile by their simultaneous attacks. This was a good timing to give the Dites some rest.

"Since you don't plan to interfere, can you help with something?
"

"Ohoh, seems like you've a plan. Sure."

Here they made their decision. The filth monster moved once more, opening its mouth to shoot out numerous sharp teeth. Layfon and Savaris split up as they leaped aside to avoid the attack.

If the enemies were only the larvae, then there was a way to solve this crisis. The tragic scream from her right halted Nina's steps.

"My hand.....!" the man screamed and fainted. Nina pulled him over and let the medical team treat him. The rate of people getting injured had increased drastically in just a day of battle. Feeling the cruelty of reality, Nina changed her direction, attempting to deal a blow to the larva before her. The heavy hit of the iron weapon broke through the larva's hard shell to strike its body. The hand in

the larvae's arm, which had been separated from its owner, had already been bitten into an unrecognizable state. Nina wanted to attack again but her feet slipped.

Stand firm.

That one opening caused her movement to slow, and the larva took that chance. A massive mouth appeared right before Nina.

"Nina!"

"Uu!"

She stuck the iron whip into the mouth and executed an external burst type Kei move. The entire body of the larva shook and the larva stopped moving. Using the corpse as a shield, Nina used Kei again – Raijin. External burst type Kei executed with extreme high speed. The friction in the air created lightning and destroyed a number of larvae in one split second. Nina immediately leaped back and breathed in deeply.

"Don't stop."

"Sorry," Sharnid said. His bullet earlier had saved her life.

"We don't have time to drag it out with these guys," he said, sweat rolling down his face. He was looking at the direction ahead of her. The Kei cannon had played a hand in keeping the larvae at bay, but filth monsters were still approaching the city, and they weren't larvae.

They were matured forms of male filth monsters.

The things shot over at Zuellni earlier were massive egg-like rocks. Inside each rock hid around 20-40 larvae. There had been 15 waves of attacks since Felli reported that Layfon had made contact with the filth monster. However, that was just the number confirmed by Psychokinesists. In fact, nine battles had been fought altogether since the landing of the first wave. Felli had reported that the group of larvae they fought now was the last wave, making this the 10th battle. The rock of the 5th wave had been shot down and now lay immobile. But now it finally woke from its slumber, revealing not larvae but five male filth monsters. What changes had the inside of the "egg" underwent? Accelerated growth? Or that the larvae had consumed each other to give birth to the male filth monsters? No doubt this posed the greatest threat to the fighting Military Artists.

"How's Dalshena?"

The liquid splashing from the vibrating wings of the filth monsters gave off a red shine under the sunlight. Dalshena had sustained an injury during the 8th battle and had left the field.

"She's got a broken leg, but that shouldn't have any lasting side effects."

"I see."

Dalshena wasn't the only one. Naruki had fainted due to overworking her Kei vein. She used Karen Kei too many times when she still hadn't completely grasped hold of how it worked.

The air shield reflected dusk. The earlier shot of the Kei cannon had missed its target to draw an arc in the sky.

"Don't shoot another cannon," Nina said.

"Makes me think of that stingy Head of Business, hugging his head in regret," Sharnid smiled.

The fact that he could still joke in this situation eased Nina's heart. Forget the male filth monsters trying to invade the city. They must first destroy the larvae here. Having had her brief rest, Nina jumped back into the front line. Sharnid's accurate shots took his bullets through the cracks in the shield of the larvae to either kill them off or slow their movements. And Nina no longer held the fear she held when she first fought the filth monsters. She could now wield the iron whips to deal heavy internal damage and defend herself using Kongoukei.

When she first fought..... she met Layfon and knew of his strength and past. She had fought the larvae after a setback. At present, she had definitely grown compared to the past. She truly felt it in this battle but she didn't feel happy about it. The enemies were still outside. Even so, Nina and the others had successfully eliminated all larvae in their designated area. Were they to fight the matured forms now?

The male filth monsters that were waiting for their chance outside the air shield were creating a huge negative setback for the Military Artists around them. Exhaustion swiftly turned to despair .

Next came the report that added frost to ice.

"A number of larvae have broken through the outskirt and destroyed the cannon. We can't use the cannon anymore."

Felli was concentrating in supporting Layfon. This was another Psychokinesist's voice.

"Wha!" Nina said in despair at the report.

"What is the current situation?"

Nina was horrified at one other thing even though it was bad they couldn't use the cannon.

"The filth monsters had broken through the third defensive line. Some people have gone chasing after them but they have yet to eliminate them....."

"Then we're heading over too!"

"Hey, don't be reckless! If you don't rest....."

Nina didn't listen to Sharnid's advice.

"I'm leaving this to you!" She left him the defensive job and headed for the inside of the city with part of the team.

Filth monsters entered a city to eat people. She didn't have to fathom what the larvae's destination was.

The shelter.

Nina knew the locations of the shelters even without the help of a Psychokinesist. She increased her pace as she drew the location of the third defensive line and the shelter around it in her head. She wasn't thinking of the Military Artists following her at all.

She had promised Layfon to protect Leerin. Of course this wasn't the only reason. She knew clearly that it was every Military Artist's job to protect the citizens. But now, all that filled her mind was Layfon's disappointed face when he returned.

Nina's speed was faster than others.

One only needed to turn the mechanism on the entrance to open the door. Right now, the door was tightly shut. Humans only needed to look at this sign to know it as an entrance, but the illiterate larvae were heading straight for this shelter. Perhaps they could sense the presence of numerous people. Perhaps they could smell them because of their keen sense of smell.

There were six larvae winging their way in.

Nina arrived earlier than them and she breathed, regulated her breathing on top of the shelter. She swung her iron whips and attacked one of the larvae.

"Uu!"

Pain shot up her right arm. Did she twist her wrist? No. Her right arm was tired for having held the heavy weapon for a long

time. The attack she dealt the filth monster just then had reached her nerves.

"The movement of your right hand is too simple."

Layfon's words flashed through her mind. She couldn't keep swinging this heavy weapon without considering the side effects of rebound, especially when it was a long fight.....Layfon had reminded her of that.

"Damn!"

Tolerating the pain, she gave the filth monster a fatal strike with her left iron whip.

Five more to go and her reinforcements had yet to arrive.

The remaining filth monsters rushed her immediately.

Combination of external and internal Kei: Kongoukei.

The Kei covering her entire body deflected two larvae. The other two filth monsters didn't have time to fold their wings before Nina's consecutive strikes hit them, killing them.

Three more to go.

"Uu.....Uu!"

The pain running up her right arm was intensifying, making it unable to move as she wanted. The rebounding Kei caused pain in her joints. She was using her left hand more to cover for her right,

and that hand felt heavier than before too. Both of her arms felt heavy.

(Just when.....)

Without her knowing, she had sunk into pondering something that had nothing to do with the fight.

(When did he start calling me Captain?)

Layfon. At first, he called her senpai. Somehow, he had started calling her captain. Just when did it happen? She had only realized it now. But she felt lonely, being called captain.

(What do I want to be called?)

Captain, senpai, or Nina?

(So stupid.)

She was in a battle right now.

The three remaining larvae folded their wings and closed off their shells. Clothed in hard black shells, the three huge insects closed in on Nina, their multi-eyes shining, devoid of emotion.

Nina's arms felt so heavy. The fingers holding the iron whips shook. But only three more to go.

(It's ok.)

She was gathering Kei. She had to protect this place.

(Because I've promised Layfon.)

She didn't want to see his sad expression again.

Internal Kei variation – Raijin.

Run.

Lightning pierced the filth monsters. They exploded before they were sent flying away.

Nina could already grasp hold of the key of this move. This had become her ultimate move, the move taught by Layfon that she could show to Dixerio.

"I.....did it."

She tottered on her feet and collapsed onto the ground. She couldn't move. It was already a miracle that she was still holding the iron whips.

She had protected Leerin.

Completely exhausted, she felt for a split second that she had finished her mission. Yes, just a split second. She only saw some shadow when she looked at the sky, but she then understood what it was.

They were five black spots. Shadows then blocked off the sunlight to shade Nina's entire body.

Male filth monsters. The five male filth monsters hovering outside the city had finally broken through the air purification shield, and all five were in top condition. As for Zuellni, all of her Military Artists were exhausted for having fought the larvae.

(If this continues.....)

Zuellni would be destroyed. Layfon would lose the place to return to. Leerin would die. Not only that, all other students here would die. What was the Mercenary Gang doing?

No.....They had lost Haia. The Mercenary Gang's prime purpose was the Haikizoku. They weren't trustworthy. These words echoed in Nina's heart.

Is this.....the real purpose? Did the Mercenary Gang deliberately allow Zuellni to face a crisis so all students sank into despair? So that the Haikizoku in Nina could awake?

"This....."

Her voice was lost. She was surprised at her own condition. She couldn't even get up. Right now, her body kept shaking and her flesh refused to listen to her.

She couldn't lose here. The cannon was useless, but Zuellni still had Vance and Gorneo.

(But, but.....)

She couldn't do anything more. She had promised Layfon, but she was sleeping here. Just why did she want to be strong? She

didn't think it was bad to let others do the work. She had kept training till now to make herself useful in battle. Even so.....

(Even so!)

"This is your true personality," a sudden voice said. "Though that stubborn wall protects your usual heart, that is your real heart . It is the heart that seeks to protect the city, the heart that hides deep in the side of the hard shell."

The owner of the voice was next to her, but Nina couldn't turn her head. It was in her blind spot.

"Who... are you?"

"Do you want to cry?"

The words touched Nina's heart.

"Wha....."

"It's your promise with the Electronic Fairy. Yes, the promise. You always live in promises. A promise between Military Artists, a promise you made in the childhood and even now, a promise with the person who can touch the most vulnerable part of your heart."

"Uu.....Uu..."

Who? Who's speaking?

"You also cannot live on your own. No need to hide that truth. You just need to give voice to your wish. Say you want power."

Stop this nonsense!

She wanted to shout but she couldn't. Her body failed to move.

"Let me give it to you. The power that can pierce through a forest of spears. Awake from your body."

The hand of that voice appeared in Nina's sight. The hand was holding something. A something filled with complicated curved lines fill her sight.

Then she didn't see anything else.

A mask had appeared on Nina's face.

Leerin lifted her head without realizing it.

"?"

She seemed to hear something.

"What is it?" Meishen asked. She looked paled.

"Ah, nothing."

It must be her imagination.

Leerin and the others were in one of the underground shelters. She was leaning against the wall. Because she had nothing to do, she was looking at the ceiling, spacing out. Bags for emergency use

lay by her feet and piled on top of them were neatly folded blankets. The air-conditioner continued to work but it was useless. The vast, sealed space was filled with the body odors of many people.

The booklet on living in a shelter said to stay in the middle of the shelter, but Leerin had chosen the location near the wall. Mifi and the others agreed with her after knowing why she did it. But Meishen was still hesitant as she was cautious in her approach with things. However, even Meishen didn't say much after living in here for three days. She looked at the people in the middle of the shelter with sympathy.

This shelter contained close to 1000 people.

Toilets. Showers. The passages connecting to other facilities were all located by the wall. It was natural for Leerin to choose this place as she had plenty of experience living in a shelter. However, it was different for others. Not that the people staying in the middle of the shelters were any better, they were just naively afraid of living in a shelter. On the other hand, Leerin was used to it. She herself must be stranger than anyone else.

"Speaking of which, this time it's so long," Mifi said, less careful than her usual self.

Everyone must be very tired. Perhaps they were used to danger now, many more people came to walk in the corridors, and as such , more arguments ensued.

Right now, it was happening somewhere too.

The commotion quieted down quickly. The City Police was taking those people away to another place.

Mifi saw someone familiar among the City Police and waved.

"How's it? Your spirit still up?" Formed asked.

"Hoho, I'm a bit tired," Mifi smiled bitterly.

"How's the situation above the ground?"

"Uh? Going all right. But it takes time to resist successive waves of enemies."

"Really."

"Ah~" Mifi lay down on the blanket. At the same time, Meishen fell.

"Mei?" Leerin said, finding it strange.

If it was Meishen, she wouldn't do something like that.

Mifi found it strange that Meishen was not responding. She looked at her face. Blood had drained from Meishen's face and she was panting heavily.

The two girls quickly sent her to the clinic.

It appeared she had come down with a fever due to over-exhaustion. The doctor said it was caused by extreme tension. A few people who were diagnosed with the same thing lay on the beds around Meishen.

As she had to look after Meishen, the burden was becoming heavier for Mifi.

(Because Naruki's not here.)

The three of them were always together. This separation was weakening them. Leerin thought of this as she told Mifi she'd leave and get some food. Mifi nodded tiredly.

Leerin walked out of the clinic and took in a deep breath. Even she herself was about to collapse. Was it because this wasn't Grendan? Because there weren't any Heaven's Blade successors? But Layfon was here. She never once doubted his strength. She could be so calm because of this belief. But what else was she thinking? Was it because her strength hadn't recovered since she fainted the last time?

Leerin pondered as she headed for the canteen.

Suddenly, she halted her steps. She stopped, not knowing why.

A path branched off before her. It didn't connect to the toilet, the shower or the canteen. This path led to the outside. For some reason, Leerin had entered this path. At present, the entrance was blocked with numerous heavy metal walls.

But she kept walking in that direction.

No one else was on the path. No one would risk it as filth monsters were still outside.

Leerin stopped after walking a while. Thick walls blocked her way.

"What am I doing?" she said.

She had no idea, but she felt there must be a reason behind her action.

"Uu....."

All of a sudden, she covered her face with a hand and knelt down on the floor. Her right eye hurt. This wasn't the usual pain. The pain was such that she couldn't even make a noise. It felt as if the nerves in her right eyeball had been cut, and the pain was now individualized, as if her right eye didn't belong to her anymore. And tears kept leaking from the eye.

(What.....?)

The pain prevented her from opening her right eye.

That was what she thought, but she did see the metal wall before her. Even though her hand was covering her eye.....

Her mind was blank. This wasn't even connected to the pain anymore. Who knew when, but the figure of a woman had appeared before the wall. That figure was blurry.....Why so blurry ? Because Leerin only saw this woman with her right eye.

Black clothes and black hair. The woman appeared before her as if attending a funeral.

(Who.....are you?)

Her right eye kept crying tears. Was it too painful? Or because it was suppressing an intense emotion? But, she didn't know.

This woman did not turn back. She just faced the wall.

What was on the other side?

So slow. No, she hadn't taken any actions. He knew clearly the filth monsters were attacking, but Dixerio hesitated in front of so many enemies. No matter the consequences of his action, it'd affect many people. What kind of influence would it be? Maybe that was the Wolf Faces' true aim?

It'd have been good if she knew nothing. But he couldn't say that now.

The mask danced in the air. Her hands held two iron whips.

Nina Antalk.

But there remained some difference between her mask and those of the Wolf Faces. The shape was the same, even the pattern was the same.

But something was different.

Using the building as a foothold, Nina jumped. The green light that seeped from the mask to envelop her entire body was something that the Wolf Faces didn't have. This was the proof of a Haikizoku.

"Damn, it's awakened."

Dixerio didn't know how Nina became possessed, but the truth was here before him.

Had she walked the same doomed road as him?

"I won't let you guys win!"

Dixerio jumped and killed the final filth monster with his weapon. Nina's iron whips had already eliminated the other four. Corpses filled the land of Zuellni.

Dixerio stood on the head of the filth monster that fell from the sky. On its back stood Nina. The two of them faced each other.

"Hey, you still conscious?"

Nina didn't reply.

"Give me the mask. You'll feel more relaxed that way."

Still no reply.

"Damn, already swallowed up?"

She was the same as him back then.....

"....."

Nina crossed the iron whips before her. How was she viewing Dixerio? As an enemy? A strange creature?

"Well then, guess I'll have to take it by force. It's good to take what I want with my power."

Dixerio readied his metal whip on his shoulder. His other arm was stretched in front of his face. When that arm was removed from his vision...

"And that is the essence of the city of Strong Desire – Velzenheim"

The same mask appeared on Dixerio's face.

The corpse of the filth monster touched the ground.

At the same time, the two Military Artists jumped to cut two green traces in the air.

Epilogue

Sharp teeth flew everywhere. Savaris avoided all the teeth by centimeters. A chill went down his spine after he took one look at the gigantic pillar of tooth stabbing the ground that was as tall as he was. Still, he smiled through his helmet. Instead of increasing his distance to the filth monster, he ran close to it.

Ten more seconds till the next attack. That was Layfon's conclusion after observing Savaris and the filth monster. Savaris deliberately slowed down as he closed in on his opponent in a relaxed manner.

Ten seconds.

The filth monster opened its mouth and at that moment, its mouth exploded.

That was Layfon. His External burst type Kei had shattered the sharp tooth the filth monster was about to shoot out. The shattered pieces ran wild inside its owner's mouth. The filth monster spat out liquid and roared in fury. It changed its target to Layfon.

Layfon kept his distance as he evaded the attacks. The filth monster chased after him, its every step shaking the earth. Layfon had to move cautiously to prevent himself from falling due to the intense shaking of the ground. He kept his speed the same as his opponent's. The distance between them remained constant. Felli's map appeared in a corner of his vision. The blue dot was him. The red dot was the filth monster, and the yellow dot chasing the red dot was Savaris.

Layfon ran in a straight line. Finally, both red and yellow dots overlapped.

"Twenty more seconds till the destination," Felli's voice sounded in his helmet. Tension was mixed in her voice.

"Please take immediate action when the target enters the destination. Don't mind me," Layfon said. He knew Felli's tension would affect the success of the fight, so he confirmed it with her again.

"..... Roger."

He kept running at a steady pace as the filth monster followed.

(Please don't let it notice.)

He prayed as he ran.

He entered the area not long after with the filth monster right behind him.

"Explode!" Felli and Fermaus both shouted.

An intense and huge keening from the earth buried his surroundings. Having anticipated the explosion, Layfon had jumped. This was the place where he first discovered the filth monster, the place where the filth monster had been shooting out the eggs. A female filth monster was beneath it which meant there was a massive empty hole in the ground. Felli and Fermaus had laid the flakes in the ground and triggered off a Psychokinesis

mine explosion, causing the ground to sink. Having lost its balance , the filth monster failed to escape the mine but it did not entirely sink into the ground. Hence Savaris gave it a final kick.

"Get down there."

The External Burst type Kei of that kick shocked the filth monster all the way to its lower body. The colossal creature fell into the hole. Savaris had used the rebound force of the kick to leap into the air.

The filth monster rolled as it fell, gathering momentum and increasing its falling rate. In the end, it fell with its back on the ground and its abdomen facing the sky.

Layfon snatched out the Adamantium Dite and the Sapphire Dite with his left hand. Their handles were still connected. He condensed the Kei in the Dites to their limits, to the limit of the cracks spreading through the Sapphire Dite. As the light that exuded from the Dites turned from green to red, he executed his move – External Burst type variation – Rumble Sword.

He threw the Sapphire Dite. The sharp Katana, holding a huge amount of Kei, stabbed right down. The color of Kei turned redder than it was allowed. The Katana stabbed the filth monster's abdomen as it drew sparks in the air. Next, the Sapphire Dite exploded and the Kei suppressed inside it shot everywhere. A large part of the filth monster's outer skin was peeled off from that result to reveal the meat of its body.

"Time for me to go," Savaris said.

Holding the Adamantium Dite, Layfon turned around the back of the blade for the Heaven's Blade to use as his dive point. The rebound force of Savaris' jump helped Layfon to stay in the air longer.

Savaris shot straight down. Since he hadn't made any special modification to the fighting suit that he borrowed from the Mercenary Gang, he couldn't use the Luckens move – Roar Kei. He now held his fist.

(Let's try this then.)

One word flowed in his mind, an absolute. He had mentioned this to Gorneo once. This didn't belong to the skills passed down in the Luckens family. This was an ultimate move that one came to learn through training. He himself hadn't yet mastered this move as he didn't want its training to prevent him from growing more. However, he couldn't train since coming to Zuellni as he had to hide himself. And training Gorneo had given him second thoughts . He had changed, and he had chosen to attempt this move. He had attempted it so he could only keep on honing it. Although one could say "hone", he could only do it all in his head. Using it in real battle for the first time was probably foolish. However, he chose to execute that move. That was what Savaris, the Heaven's Blade successor, was like.

External Burst type variation – Absolute, full power, Stab.

His fist hammered into the filth monster's body. This move belonged to the Kei skill that ran through an enemy's entire body to destroy it. This was the true essence of the Luckens' combat skill

, a skill invented against filth monsters, a move made to allow bare-handed fighting. Roar Kei was one of those moves, a secret that allowed one to fight without physically lifting a finger. Since too few people managed to master this move, it had become a high level move in the Luckens family. To Savaris, the shaking first spread through the air, and then the explosions started from the filth monster itself. A full power stab was more intense than a mere strike by a fist. It was a move that could sink Kei into the depths of the enemy's body and explode from the inside.

Bearing the destructive power of the Kei in the fist, the armored plates failed to shoulder the enormous Kei, but there was a way to solve this problem.

The filth monster shook intensely. A large amount of liquid shot from its mouth.

Savaris stepped back quickly, took out a small spray from his clothes and sprayed the liquid on his fist, filling the cracks in his gloves. However, that failed to alleviate the pain in his fist. It seemed he couldn't use his right hand anymore in this battle.

At the time of Savaris taking out the emergency spray, Layfon's shadow cut through his vision. He landed in front of Savaris with the huge and long Adamantium Dite on his back, as if it was hiding behind him. The Katana on his back rattled from the massive amount of Kei condensed inside it.

The Kei in the blade suddenly disappeared.

Heaven's Blade technique – Kasumirou.

This was a technique that he invented when he was a Heaven's Blade successor.

Similar to Savaris' Absolute Stab, Layfon's technique was a strike that let his Kei run into the filth monster's body. The Kei then turned into numerous strikes like rain to destroy the enemy from its inside.

"Wu!"

Layfon tossed away the Adamantium Dite. As it couldn't bear the pressure of the Kei, it exploded.

The organs of the filth monster had taken Savaris's blow and were now being cut down by Layfon's move. A filth monster was still a living creature. Even though it had the power to re-grow its outer skin, the level of damage to its body was too severe for it to revive.

Layfon and Savaris watched the enemy from a distance through a screen of dust and sand.

"Almost finished?"

"If that's the case, then good," Layfon replied.

Savaris had sacrificed his right hand and Layfon had lost two Dites. Forget Savaris for now. Layfon had lost the Sapphire Dite that could turn into steel threads and the Adamantium Dite that

was his greatest fighting strength. The loss of these two had dramatically decreased his fighting power. If the filth monster didn't fall, Layfon had nothing left to fight it.

"We should cut off its neck just in case, but that thing is under the ground and it's got thick skin and tendons..... It's a bit much for us right now," Savaris calmly analyzed the situation.

So now they could only wait for the result.

Next came Felli's unfortunate report.

"..... The temperature of the target is rising."

They hadn't killed it.

The ground around the filth monster trembled. Liquid continued to shoot from the filth monster's abdomen. Savaris silently held his left hand as Layfon restored the Shim Adamantium Dite.

"Well, we can only go in."

"..... Yes," Layfon agreed.

Felli's voice sounded in his helmet. "Please escape!"

..... But where could they go? Zuellni's multi-leg was broken. Even if it could move, it couldn't run forever from the filth monster . They could only make a bet with this fight.

Layfon pondered another strategy.

BANG!!

This sound was impossible. But after knowing this sound came from the filth monster and thinking that if it was that person, then nothing was too strange.

It was a pillar of light. The light had shot through the rising filth monster and dispersed into the air. But this was all after the fact.

"..... What?" Layfon was at a loss. The filth monster was dead. He didn't need Felli to confirm it for him. It was completely dead.

"Anyway, we're saved. Even though it's an insult that has got nothing to do with my real strength....." Savaris's reply was cold. "Next is to complete the mission I'm here for."

His words restored the calmness in Layfon's head. Savaris was here to take the Haikizoku, the Haikizoku that lived in Nina.

"..... Can you just leave it?" he asked with carefully chosen words. He knew Savaris's strength. Even though Savaris didn't have his Heaven's Blade with him, Layfon still didn't want to fight him.

"..... Personally, I want to fight you, but would Her Majesty be satisfied? Or, even if she forgives him, would Kanaris understand? She'd be angry. And that's gonna be troublesome."

"Really!!" Layfon swung the Shim Adamantium Dite at him without hesitation. The remnants of Kei exploded. His strike drew an arc in the sky.

Savaris was gone.

"I knew you'd do that," came his carefree laughter. He had first read Layfon's move.

"Let me do this, then you'll use your full strength."

Savaris's presence was disappearing fast. Layfon rushed out of the screen of dust and saw him riding the bike for Zuellni.

"Damn!"

He ran for his own bike.

150 Jimels. Target was Zuellni. The curtain of the long chase rose.

Blue light accompanied every shake of the space. The ground shook.

"Damn, this isn't the time to play!" Dixerio rolled his tongue under the attack of the iron whips. The amount of Kei in the Haikizoku continued to increase, and the density of Internal Kei rose as well. One's dexterity increased. Dixerio knew this theory earlier than Nina. Still, an increase in fighting power didn't usually translate to an improvement in skill. Sure, however good one's skill was, one would fall in front of overwhelming power, but this was different when both fighters possessed the same amount of

power. In that case, the outcome came down to one's skill and experience. He deeply believed that he wouldn't lose to her in both skill and experience. Nevertheless, she managed to corner him.

(Can't she see I'm holding back?)

He didn't plan to kill her so he held back in his every move. Was this it?

(Is that why she has the advantage?)

This was the truth. Nina had cornered him step by step despite his confidence in his strategies, as if she didn't fear her enemy, no matter how strong he was. Dixerio wouldn't understand that Nina could reach this level because she kept challenging the high wall that Layfon's presence held.

"But!" he shouted after tens of rounds.

His heavy metal whip hit her right shoulder. She didn't stop moving. Dixerio was surprised as he felt the feeling through his right wrist.

Kongoukei.

Still, Dixerio's strike did have its impact. Because she had failed to completely defend herself from his Kei, Nina's right hand lost its grip on the iron whip. The iron whip fell onto the ground. But she didn't stop her movement. She lifted the left iron whip to strike his face.

Suddenly, blue light rippled out in that space.

Nina stopped. Dixerio stopped.

Nina's iron whip stopped.

Dixerio's hand gripped her whip.

"My hand isn't that cheap."

The skin of his hand ripped and blood flowed. He pulled her down onto the ground with her still holding tightly to the weapon. He raised the whip.

Kongoukei.

She continued to release her Kei to defend. However, he had already anticipated that move.

Internal and External Kei variation – Raitei. Raijin, a move used in close distance with the enemy, had become Raitei. It broke through Nina's Kongoukei and the whip hit her on her stomach.

"Haaah!" she screamed and fell immobile. The mask fell from her face as she fainted.

"Geez..... Took me so much strength," he bent to pick up the mask but the mask slipped from his palm.

"What?" he looked at it, confused.

The mask was now in someone's hand. He looked at this new person, speechless.

"Hey, hey....."

Speechless. Before being forcefully pulled into Zuellni, he had once infiltrated Grendan just to see this person. Now.....

"Hey, why are you here?"

The girl wearing funeral-like black clothes didn't reply. She kept silent..... and vanished.

A person stood in the courtyard of Grendan's palace. Her two hands were put together as if she was aiming a shot.

"Straight through the heart!" Alsheyra, the owner of the palace, shouted happily.

"I'm sorry, I didn't see it....." Kanaris said calmly behind her. A scarf encircled her neck to hide the trace of injury on it. However , the person who made that injury didn't seem to care.

"Aaa, well, whatever. It's a feeling of obliterating an interference . Compared to that, look over there. Over there! You can see the flag. Aaa, it's spotless as I imagined. Great. A brilliant reunion! As if I'm a knight on a white horse, out to rescue an imprisoned princess!"

"No, you're the Queen. Compared to that, I can't even see the filth monster. Do you think I can see what's beyond it?"

Alsheyra didn't seem to hear her.

"Wait for me Leerin, I'll be right there to receive you!" she said happily.

Kanaris sighed.

Grendan moved forward. It kept heading straight for Zuellni.